

ALL THE YEAR ROUND.

A WEEKLY JOURNAL.

CONDUCTED BY CHARLES DICKENS.

WITH WHICH IS INCORPORATED HOUSEHOLD WORDS.

N^o. 435.]

SATURDAY, AUGUST 24, 1867.

[PRICE 2d.]

MABEL'S PROGRESS.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "AUNT MARGARET'S TROUBLE."

BOOK IV.

CHAPTER IX. CONFIDENCES.

MRS. SAXELBY, on her arrival in Dublin with Dooley, was met by the news of Mr. Charlewood's sudden death, and of the calamity—now known to all the world—that had overtaken the great house of Gandry and Charlewood. The tidings shocked her greatly. She had seen Clement on the night before she left Hammerham, and he had then made no mention of his father's illness, or of impending disaster. Yet this was the very evening on which Lady Popham's concert took place, and on which Walter had received the fatal telegram.

"It is true," said Mrs. Saxelby, musingly, "that Clement looked shockingly ill—quite haggard and old."

Mabel drooped her head wearily.

"You are pale to-day, Mabel," said her mother. She held her daughter a little away from her, with both hands upon the girl's dark shining hair. The face she looked on now was more beautiful than that from which she had parted at Hazlehurst. There was more depth of expression in the grey eyes, shaded by their thick lashes. The contour of the cheeks was, perhaps, somewhat less full, but the features looked more formed and set, and the graceful lithe figure had become developed into the rounded outlines of early womanhood.

"You look better than when you left East-field, my child," said Mrs. Saxelby, regarding her fondly. "And yet you are working terribly hard here, too."

"Yes, mamma dear; but there is all the difference between free labour and the treadmill! My work here is done willingly, and there is hope at the end of it."

The widow and her children were installed in the lodgings which had been taken for them in Kelly's-square, in the near neighbourhood of Mr. Walton's house. Mrs. Saxelby had already taken the colours of the people about her with chameleon-like facility, and seemed to have forgotten her former doubts and objections to the theatre completely. She was never weary of listening to Mabel's theatrical experiences; or

of hearing her daughter tell, with very innocent pride, of the favour with which the audience now received her, of the practice she was getting, and of the daily progress that she felt she was making in her art. But very often, and, as it were, in Mabel's own despite, the talk between the mother and daughter would come round to the topic of the Charlewoods' altered fortunes.

"Dear, dear!" Mrs. Saxelby would say for the hundredth time, "to think—only to think of the Charlewoods' coming to be poor!"

Once, when they had been sitting silent in the twilight of a Sunday evening, Mrs. Saxelby exclaimed, suddenly, "How strangely things come about in this world, don't they? Fortune's wheel! Yes, truly a wheel. And it turns and turns—only some people get shaken off into the mire, and never have a chance of rising again. Do you remember, my dear, that day of the music meeting, and the accident?"

Mabel turned her head. Her mother could not see her face in the dim light, but her attitude was attentive.

"I will tell you what made me think of it, Mabel. I saw that little girl with your cousin Polly in church to-day, and it seemed so curious to reflect upon the changes that have taken place since you first saw her. Do you remember that day when Clement Charlewood—poor Clement!—tried to dissuade you from going to New Bridge-street?"

A little pause.

"Mabel! Do you remember?"

"Yes, mamma."

"And to think now that that child's brother should be received by such people as Lady Popham! By-the-by, I have never yet seen her brother. It is odd, considering that the little girl is to be apprenticed to your cousin's husband. How kind it was of Mr. Bensa to take her without a premium, was it not?"

This time the response was instant and hearty.

"Very kind, mamma. The Bensas' are thoroughly good people."

"Of course," pursued Mrs. Saxelby, "Mr. Bensa will pay himself out of her earnings, if he succeeds in making a singer of her. But, then, look at the risks meanwhile! It is odd, though, that I should not have chanced to see the brother yet. I remember you mentioned these Trescotts once or twice in your letters from Kildare, and I concluded that they were quite

intimate with your aunt's family. Do they continue to like Alfred Trescott?"

"Oh, mamma," cried Mabel, hastily, "don't speak of him! The sound of his name is odious to me."

"Mabel! What do you mean?"

"I will tell you, dear mamma. I meant to tell you some time; but I did not want to annoy your ears with the tale the moment you arrived."

"But now that you have said so much, Mabel, you must say more," said Mrs. Saxelby, nervously. Mabel rose and paced about the room.

"Oh, don't frighten yourself, mamma dear," she said. "It was an annoyance—a great annoyance to me. But it is not worth distressing ourselves about further. The day before you arrived, Mr. Alfred Trescott did me the honour to ask me to marry him."

"To marry him! *Him!* I never heard such presumption."

"I do not know, mamma, that I have any right to say so."

"Don't tell me, Mabel. A low, vulgar, worthless fellow. I remember so well what Clement Charlewood said to me of him long ago. Oh, it puts me past all patience! This is the consequence of being mixed up with such people. Ah, Mabel, Mabel, I wish you had stayed at Eastfield, or done anything rather than this."

Mrs. Saxelby's unstable mind was already veering round again to the opposite opinion to that which she had begun to entertain respecting her daughter's line of conduct.

"But tell me what he said," she continued.

"I need not ask how you answered him."

"It was more the manner in which the offer was made, than the offer itself, that offended me," said Mabel.

And then she proceeded to relate to her mother how Alfred Trescott, "with all his blushing honours thick upon him," had come to her, and laid them, with a flourish, at her feet. She had been much startled; but she had endeavoured to make her positive refusal as gentle and as little painful as she could.

"I think you treated him a great deal too well," said Mrs. Saxelby.

"Mamma, I had no right to resent his offer. And I wished to spare him pain, if he really—if he had any—if, in short, he were truly in earnest," stammered Mabel. "But on my answer, repeated more than once with what deliberate assurance I could command of its being irrevocable—I was taken by surprise and agitated—he grew quite violent. I think I should have been frightened, had he not made me angry by something he said. But you know strong indignation drives out fear."

"Insolent wretch! What did he say?"

"Oh, some coarse insulting words about—I hate to repeat them, even to you. He said that he supposed I looked for riches, but that *now* I might find myself mistaken; for that Mr. Clement Charlewood—he spoke the

name openly—would be shortly left independent and wealthy, by his father's death, and that it was very unlikely he would still think of me. I bade him instantly leave my presence, and never dare to speak to me again. Then he changed his mood, and threw himself into a wild state of excitement, imploring my pardon, and trying to fall on his knees before me. But I could endure no more. I left him without another word, and I have not seen him since."

Mrs. Saxelby poured out the vials of her wrath upon Alfred Trescott. It was a ladylike and not very terrible wrath; but it was real. Will not even a timid barn-door hen cluck and peck, and beat her wings, if one offers to molest her chickens?

A short time after this conversation, Carlo Bensa informed them that Miss O'Brien was going abroad. Mrs. Dawson was to meet her son and his bride at Nice on their homeward journey, Miss O'Brien was going with her aunt, and they would all return to England together. Lady Popham would depart for London in a few weeks, and young Trescott was to accompany his patroness to the metropolis. Such was the news that the singing-master brought from Merriion-square.

"Hum, going abroad?" said Mrs. Saxelby, musingly, when Bensa had gone away. "Ah, well, I suppose *that* is all over now. If the Charlewoods have come down in the world as much as people are saying, of course Clement's match will be broken off."

"Broken off, mamma?"

"To be sure. You don't suppose that people like these Dawsons would think of allowing Miss O'Brien to marry a ruined man? Penelope told me as much as made it plain to my mind that Augusta's husband considered his family a fair exchange for her wealth. But now, if there is no wealth! Don't you see, Mabel?"

"Oh, mamma, mamma, how hard it will be for him! If he really loves her, mamma, think how he must suffer!"

"As to that, my dear child, I suppose he will, in a measure; but I dare say it won't break his heart. Men get over these things with wonderful philosophy."

Poor Mrs. Saxelby had not been able quite to forgive Clement Charlewood for the easy way in which she supposed him to have got "off with the old love" and "on with the new." It was true that Mabel had refused him. Of course, that was quite true; but Clement ought to have pined and persevered a great deal longer, if even it would not more have become him to refuse consolation from that time forth for evermore.

Mabel said no further word on the subject, but her thoughts were busied with it often. Ay, often when her lips were mechanically uttering the words of her stage part, or her eyes were mechanically conning her task for the evening.

"I would not have abandoned him, though ten times his present ruin had befallen him, if—I had been his affianced wife." So ran her

meditations. "I would have been proud and happy to stand by his side in the face of all the world, even though we two had stood alone, hand in hand. It must be so sweet to give everything to one whom we love!"

She started as a recollection pierced her. This sweetness of self-sacrifice, the joy of this lavish offering, she had denied to Clement Charlewood. He had once longed to give up everything for her sake. He had been ready and willing to take her hand, and, if need were, to stand singly by her side before the eyes of all men. Her pride had repulsed the offer. She could not stoop to accept *everything* from his hand.

"Ah! but then I did not—did not—love him."

Not then? Not *then*, Mabel?

It is said, sometimes, that the inner life of the soul is not measured by the progress of time, as is the outer life of the body; that we may pass through years of experience in one brief hour. Is it not, rather, that the results of that inner life are made apparent to our consciousness suddenly, and that the process by which the results are attained escapes us? No human eye can perceive the growth of the humblest weed. You may watch, and watch incessantly; no movement is perceptible. But all the time the sun shines, the dew falls, the winds breathe, and, on a sudden, lo! there is the perfect flower! And we say, "It seems to have arisen by magic." But there is no magic in the matter.

In the breast of Alfred Trescott, rage, disappointment, wounded vanity, and bitter burning jealousy, struggled with some feeling that he called love, and that made him more than ever desirous of winning the haughty girl who had so decisively and, as he thought, contemptuously rejected him. It mattered not that Mabel's manner, though cold, had been gentle and courteous, until her pride and womanhood had been outraged by his coarse allusion to Clement Charlewood. It mattered not that he had allowed his violent temper and ungoverned egotism to lead him into extravagant demonstrations of passion calculated to shock and offend a young girl such as Mabel, past forgiveness. It mattered not that throughout he had *not of himself* to the exclusion of any manly consideration for her feelings. She had refused him; had bade him quit her presence and never dare to address her more. He was furious. But his fury was directed less against Mabel than Clement Charlewood. His malignant pleasure at the news of the ruin that had befallen the family at Bramley Manor was dashed by the thought that Clement, ruined and disgraced, might yet be lord of that which he, Alfred, coveted in vain; and a revelation, made to him by Lady Popham, poured the last drop of gall into his heart, and filled it, even to overflowing, with hatred.

Alfred had now reached such a degree of confidential intimacy with his patroness, that his love for Mabel was freely discussed between them.

"She is led away by dreams of ambition,

Lady Popham, but she will not easily find a more devoted heart than mine," said Alfred, with well-acted despondency.

"Ambition, indeed!" cried my lady, tossing her head. "What does the girl dream of? Does she expect to marry a duke? Besides, that is not the question. She gave you encouragement. Strive as you will to shield her, you can't deny that."

Then my lady in her indignation told Alfred of Mr. Clement Charlewood's visit to Cloncoolin; and though she did not repeat the exact terms in which young Charlewood had spoken of him, she said enough to reveal the unfavourable nature of his words.

"I believe the girl has been playing fast and loose between you," said the angry old lady. She was raising a demon that she was powerless to guide or quell. How terrified would the foolish, kindly, impetuous old woman have been, could she but have understood for one moment the real nature of the spirit that glared out at her from beneath those black silk lashes, as she told the tale of Clement's visit to Cloncoolin!

CHAPTER X. CORDA CHOOSES.

ALFRED TRESCOTT left Merriam-square with a tearing passion in his breast, that even his practised cunning was unable wholly to conceal from Lady Popham's observation.

"Poor fellow!" thought my lady. "All fire and feeling! Nothing shall induce me to believe that he has not southern blood in his veins. Those eyes and that temperament never belonged to an Anglo-Saxon pur sang."

The young man hurried through the streets with a swift foot, and a feeling as though he were borne along on wings. There was no familiar demon to buoy up his steps, but the evil spirit within himself was strong to sustain him. He scarcely felt the ground as he walked, and his face looked positively diabolical in its malignant beauty. The rage that possessed him, and that made him feel as though filled with an unnatural force, tore and burnt the body which it animated. It was literally as though a keen-edged, deadly blade, were piercing the frail scabbard that contained it.

He dashed into the little parlour where his father was sitting at his usual employment, with a pile of music-paper before him.

"Hallo, Alf!" cried Mr. Trescott, looking up, on his son's abrupt entrance. "What's the matter? Bless my soul, you look as if you'd been committing murder!"

Alfred made no reply; but the face he turned towards his father certainly justified the startling exclamation. It was quite livid—Alfred always grew pale, and never red, in anger—and he was gnawing his under lip with his sharp white teeth.

"I want to speak to you, Alf," proceeded Mr. Trescott.

"I haven't time," snarled his son, savagely. "I'm going out again directly. Do you suppose I've nothing to do but to maunder about all day in this beastly den?"

Mr. Trescott's impression was that Alfred had been drinking. Absolute intoxication was very unfrequent with him. Not because he was temperate, but because he seemed unassailable by the vulgar physical retribution that usually follows excess. He would walk away, cool and wary, from orgies that left older men prostrate, or flushed and maddened with strong liquor. Still there were symptoms which his father well knew and recognised, that generally betrayed when Alfred had been drinking deeply—the white face, the glaring eye, the furious temper, tiger-like in its treacherous suddenness.

"I only wanted to say one word to you about Corda, Alf."

"What about Corda?"

"I told you that Bensa had offered to take her as his articulated pupil, without a premium; and to pay himself out of her earnings if he makes a singer of her."

"You did tell me; and I told *you* what I thought about it. I should say no at once. We don't want Mr. Carlo Bensa's kind assistance. Skulking little fox!"

"But Corda, Alf, Corda! This offer of Bensa's holds out a prospect for her that is not likely to recur. The child is fond, too, of his wife and all of 'em—"

"The child's a deuced sight *too* fond of whining and whimpering to strangers, and carrying tales. I have told you over and over again that *I'll* look after Corda; but I'll do it in my own way, and at my own time, and I won't be dictated to by anybody."

"Well, Alf," said Mr. Trescott, looking up defiantly while his lame side twitched nervously, "I don't see that much good has come, or is likely to come, to her from your brotherly love and protection. We won't trouble you. I am Corda's father, and have a right to do as I like. And the long and the short of it is, that I have accepted Bensa's offer. I merely wished to tell you."

Alfred rapped out a fierce oath. "You have accepted, have you?" said he, glaring at his father. "What the devil have you been wasting my time for in jawing about it, then? It will be better for *me*, no doubt. I wash my hands of her. Whether you haven't made a little mistake in your calculations, time will show."

Mr. Trescott shrugged his shoulders. "Here is a note for you," he said, "that I got at the treasury this morning when I went for my money and yours. They gave me your week's salary, but I expect I know pretty well what the note is about."

Alfred tore the letter open, and, having read it, tossed it contemptuously across to his father. It was a dismissal from his situation in the orchestra of the Dublin theatre, couched in a few severe words, referring to his constant neglect of his duties there.

"It's a pity," sighed the father. "You might as well have had the money up to the end of the season. But I knew this would come. I was sure of it. Barker has been very waxy about you for this long time past."

Alfred audibly consigned Mr. Barker and all his company to the uttermost depths of destruction. "Did the fool think his twopence-halfpenny a week could keep an artist like *me* in his hand? Did he suppose *I* was going to sit fiddling to his trash of raw-head and bloody-bone melodramas night after night? Ecod, its amusing!"

But the laugh with which Mr. Alfred Trescott concluded and emphasised his speech was by no means amusing. It so little amused Corda, who entered the room in the midst of it, that she stood trembling and astonished in the doorway, with her eyes fixed on her brother.

Her father called the child to him. "You look frightened, little one," said he, soothingly. But his countenance, too, was disturbed, and his hand shook as it stroked her hair.

"Oh, that's the latest thing, is it?" muttered Alfred, glancing at them with a frown. "She's frightened of me, is she? Go on. You're improving her education at a pretty rate, and she's an apt scholar in hypocrisy and humbug."

Corda broke from her father, who made a half-concealed effort to detain her, and, running to Alfred, took his hand and kissed it. She could not reach to his face, for he stood stiffly at his full height.

"Dear Alf," she said, "I am not afraid of you, and no one can make me so; no one tries to do so, indeed. I do love you, Alf; you know I love you!"

It may have been the mere soothing to his self-love, sorely stung as it had been that day, or perhaps—God knows—some throb of natural affection not quite deadened in his perverted heart, that made him stoop and kiss her. The child threw her arms around his neck and pressed him to her breast with all her feeble power. "There's my own Alf," she said, in her quaint grave way, though her lips quivered and the tears were shining in her eyes. "You *will* be good, won't you, Alf dear?"

"Look here, pussy-cat," said her brother, suddenly. "I want to speak to you."

He seated himself and drew her to his side with one arm about her waist, and his other hand on her forehead, so that he could read her upturned face at his ease. "I think you *are* fond of me." He checked her eager answer, and went on. "Now, I am going to see whether it's all talk or whether there's anything real in it; do you understand? I am going to London. You know that. Very well. There has been some talk of apprenticing you to Mr. Bensa. Don't interrupt me, father! You shall have your say afterwards. Now, Corda, I don't like that scheme at all. I'm not fond of the Bensas, and I know very well that there's no love lost between us. If you stay here with them I shall wash my hands of you, get rid of you, trouble myself no more about you. You know what I mean. No need to cry. Listen. If, instead of that, you go to town with me and the governor, I will look after you. I have high friends, rich friends, who can help me, and

help me to help you. Now choose for yourself. I give you till to-morrow to decide. But, you know me, Corda; if I bid you good-bye here, and leave you with the Bensas, it will be a good-bye that may last your lifetime."

Mr. Trescott broke in excitedly:

"I won't have this, Alfred. It is cruel. You are torturing the child to no purpose. She cannot decide for herself. I—I must decide for her, judge for her, and think of her future."

He limped about as his habit was when strongly moved or irritated, and Corda looked from her father to her brother with sad perplexed eyes, blurred by tears.

Alfred ran up-stairs to his bedroom, whence he presently returned with a gay silver-mounted cane, and a pair of fresh delicate-hued gloves. He had arranged his long hair picturesquely, and had effaced in a great measure the traces of anger and excitement from his countenance. He passed through the small parlour in silence; but when his hand was on the door Corda raised her face, which had been hidden in her hands, and said: "Alf dear, Miss Mabel is going to London too, isn't she? Should I see her there?"

The varying hues of the sea, when the wild wind drives the clouds above it, are not more swift and startling in their changes than were the expressions that flitted over Alfred's handsome, evil young face, as his sister spoke. For one instant he stood irresolute, his dark eyes blazing, and his whole mien that of one who was about to burst forth into some violent ebullition of anger. But he restrained the impulse. The straight dark brows drew together into a black frown; the well-cut mouth writhed itself into a sneer.

"Yes, Corda," he said, very slowly, and in a soft sweet voice that was unnatural in its tone, "yes; if that is an inducement, I think I can promise that you shall see—Miss Mabel, if you go to London."

When her brother had left the house, Corda remained silent for some time, with her soft brown curls bowed down upon her hands. Mr. Trescott continued to move fretfully about the room, now and again uttering ejaculations of impatience and vexation. At length he took up his pen, and seated himself again before his music-paper.

Then Corda rose and crept up to him.

"Papa," she whispered, timidly.

"Well, my pet?"

"May I—will you let me do as I like?"

"I cannot promise that, my little girl. You are not old enough to judge what is best for you."

Corda was silent for a few minutes, and laid a caressing hand on her father's shoulder. Presently a hot tear fell on Mr. Trescott's hand as he wrote; then another, and another. He turned and looked at Corda. The sight of her sorrow was unendurable to him.

"Why, my pretty, my gentle little girlie, you mustn't fret! Don't cry, Corda; for God's sake don't cry! I will—I—There, you shall do anything you like, if you only will not fret."

She threw herself into her father's arms.

"Oh, papa dear, I am so sorry for Alf. Yes; yes, I know that he is getting on well, and all that. And, of course, he is quite sure to succeed in London. *Almost* quite sure, if—he will practise a little more. But, papa, I sometimes think that Alf wants somebody to help him to be good, and to love him. You saw that he was kind to me just now, although he had been in one of his naughty passionate moods the minute before."

"Kind to thee, my little lamb! Who could be unkind to my Corda? But Alf doesn't treat you well. Nor me either."

"I don't mind, papa—not for myself, that is. I know he does not really mean it. And—don't be angry with me, papa—but I think sometimes that he sees you love me the best; and he may fancy, you know, that nobody loves him. And, papa, he is mamma's boy too, isn't he? Poor mamma, who died when I was a tiny baby! I never knew mamma; but, somehow, I feel so sure that she would wish me to stay with Alf, and to love him. Perhaps—don't be sorry, dear, it's only *perhaps*, you know—I might not live to grow very old. And if I died before Alfred, I should like to tell mamma when I see her in heaven, that I loved her boy, and stayed with him to the last."

The sweet voice faltered, and the delicate head drooped on her father's shoulder, and his tears were mingled with hers.

Truly Miss Fluke had found Corda an unpromising pupil, and had made many dismal moans over her dark and unconverted state of mind. But it may be—although the suggestion is doubtless a bold one—that there is a higher code of Christian ethics than even Miss Fluke's, a code which finds some echo in every human heart, and whose ruling law is Love.

When Alfred returned home that evening, Corda, who had been sitting up for him in her own little room, stole forth to tell him that papa had consented to let her go with him to London, and that she was very glad.

"The governor's come round to see which side of his bread the butter lies, has he?" said Alfred. "But, Corda, you shan't repent sticking to me. You shall be made a singer yet, if you've set your heart on it. I'll get you the first masters in London, men who wouldn't hire Bensa to play accompaniments for them. You shall ride in your carriage, and splash Bensa with the mud from its wheels, some day. By G— you shall!"

"Hush, *please*, Alf dear! Thank you very much; but I do think Mr. Bensa is very clever and very kind, and I love him and Madame Bensa very much. Only, of course, Alf, I love you better, and so does papa."

It had been a struggle for the child to resign the hope of a home with these kind people, and the prospect of being thoroughly instructed in the art she loved so well.

"But," said Corda, sagely to herself, as she took off and neatly folded her poor garments before going to rest, "being apprenticed to

Mr. Bensa always seemed too easy and pleasant to be real. I liked it so much, that I didn't believe it *could* come true. I want so very much to do right. I hope this is right, and I think it must be, for—it's an odd thing, but I have always noticed it—the things that are easy and pleasant, and that you like best, are so often wrong."

It was a hard saying for so young a creature. But Corda's life-lessons were being learned in a hard school.

CHAPTER XI. THE LONDON MANAGER.

"HAVE you it on authority?" asked Mrs. Digby Wylde, the leading lady, in a deep-toned voice. "Because it seems to me very, *very* improbable."

"To be sure," rejoined our old acquaintance, Mr. Snell, recently promoted to the position of second low comedian at the Theatre Royal, Dublin; "on the best authority. Oh, it's quite correct, you may depend upon it, Mrs. Wylde. You'll see our young friend's name in big letters at the Royal Thespian Theatre before next year's out. And *that's* a nice state of things for the profession to have come to, ain't it?"

Mrs. Digby Wylde smiled contemptuously.

"To me," she said, in her loftiest manner, "it matters little. For the sake of the profession in general, I own I think this kind of thing deplorable—deplorable!"

"Ah—h—h," exclaimed a stout old gentleman, in a court suit and powdered wig, drawing a long breath and nodding portentously, "I tell you what it is, ma'am, the London stage is going to the deuce as fast as it can go. The provinces, ma'am, the provinces are the home of the drama. I went to London for a fortnight during our last vacation, and I was astonished at the exhibitions they will tolerate on the metropolitan boards. By George, I should like to see 'em stand it here, that's all! Why, they'd fling the benches at you!"

"Umph!" grunted Jerry Shaw, who was squeezed into the darkest corner of the green-room, where this talk was going on one evening during the performance. "Aha! Well, it's a comfort for us who can't get to London to think of that, anyhow."

Mrs. Wylde merely shrugged her shoulders disdainfully. She had tried one or two passages of arms with old Jerry, and—being by no means a fool—had perceived the unlikelihood of any glory to be derived by her from such combats. She therefore preserved an attitude of armed neutrality in his presence. But the stout old gentleman, who was rather obtuse, did not imitate her wisdom.

"Mr. Shaw," said he, with some heat, "I'll trouble you to speak for yourself when you talk about people who *can't* get to London. I beg to inform you, sir, that as far as I am concerned, the difficulties have been all of my own making—all of my own making, sir."

"Of course," said Jerry, in his sharpest

tones, and jerking out his words in little short sentences, "no doubt of that. You wouldn't suit the Cockneys a bit. No more should I. You're too clever for 'em. And I'm not clever enough. That's a *quare* thing when you come to look at it."

Mr. Snell stood by, rubbing his hands, and maliciously enjoying the duel—a very unequal one, save that the stout old gentleman possessed that mail of proof which Napoleon ascribed to the British army—he did not know when he was beaten.

"Well," said Mr. Snell, "it's to be hoped that Miss M. A. Bell will prove clever enough, and not too clever. It's a fine thing to be a novice. I wish I was a novice. Perhaps a London manager would take a fancy to me, then."

"Perhaps he might," said Jerry, "because then there'd be some hope of your improving."

"Ha, ha! Not bad, Mr. Shaw, not bad," laughed Mr. Snell, colouring scarlet through his stage rouge. "I'm never angry at anything *you* say."

"Sorry I can't return the compliment. I'm angry at a good many things *you* say."

"Oh!" sneered Mr. Snell, "if you're angry with everybody who doesn't admire Miss Bell, you'll have plenty to do."

"But if I make friends with everybody who does admire her, I shall have a vast deal more to do. Why the devil—I beg your pardon, Mrs. Wylde—why in the world can't you let the girl alone? Isn't she as sweet and good natured as a May morning? Does she ever carp, or backbite, or say unkind things of, or to, any of ye? I was going to say, 'isn't she a lady to the backbone,' but on second thoughts I won't trouble you with that argument," muttered old Jerry, finishing his speech almost inaudibly.

"Mr. Shaw is of opinion," said Mrs. Wylde, majestically, "that his present hearers are incompetent to appreciate Miss Bell's ladylike qualities."

At this moment the call-boy summoned Mr. Shaw, and Jerry hobbled out of the green-room without deigning to reply to Mrs. Wylde's last speech.

"But is it really true, Snell," said the stout old man, as soon as Jerry Shaw had left the room—"is it really true that Allen has engaged Miss Bell for the Thespian?"

"I believe it is. I tell you how I heard it. My dresser is the landlord of the house where the Trescotts lodge, and he says that little Corda is full of some grand thing or other that's to happen to Miss Bell, and that she said she was going to London; and my dresser says, too, he suspects there's been some split between that conceited puppy Alfred Trescott and the Walton party. But the little girl won't say anything about it, or can't. And I know, too, from another source, that Allen spoke very highly of Miss B. to Barker. And altogether, I should say there's no doubt that—"

The tide of Mr. Snell's gossip was cut short here by the entrance into the green-room of Mr. Alaric Allen, the London manager, whose supposed approval of poor Mabel had excited such commotion in the theatre. This gentleman, besides being the manager of a leading London theatre, was also one of the most accomplished actors of his day. He was at present performing in Dublin as a "star." And we may know positively, what Mr. Snell could only make a shrewd guess at, by dint of piecing together such scraps of second-hand information as he could gather, and which he was never deterred from availing himself of by any foolish scruples of delicacy or honour. It was true that Mr. Alaric Allen, lessee and manager of the Royal Thespian Theatre, London, had been so struck by Mabel's fresh grace and dramatic power, that he had offered her an engagement for the following season at his theatre, promising to bring her out with every advantage that the resources of his establishment could command; for it was a time of peculiar dearth and barrenness in the theatrical field, and a novelty—above all, a *young* novelty—was being sought for by more than one enterprising manager. Besides, too, the only successful début, for a long time past, had taken place at the theatre of a rival manager, whom Mr. Alaric Allen cordially hated, and to compete with Dobbs, and to beat him on his own ground, would be a very agreeable thing for Mr. Alaric Allen. Dobbs's débutante was a Pomeranian lady, who, oddly enough, talked with a slight brogue, and who—her spécialité being rather the pantomimic than the dramatic art—had pieces written for her in which she invariably crossed a ravine or a mountain torrent, or even simply passed from house-top to house-top, on the slack rope. This feat, very gracefully performed in a very airy costume, had taken the town by storm, and for a long time had brought large sums of money to Mr. Dobbs's exchequer. But at last the town appeared to have had enough of the slack rope; and, as Mr. Dobbs pathetically observed, even the tight rope—for the Pomeranian lady tried that—failed to pull the houses up again.

"I think we'll do a little better than the Pomeranian," said Mr. Alaric Allen to his wife, when they were discussing Mabel. Mr. Allen's theatre was really one of the best conducted and of the highest standing in London. He himself was a man of considerable culture outside his own especial art, and he had an honest love for acting which made him desire to present his plays to the public interpreted by the best performers whose services he was able to command.

It was settled that Mabel should remain in Mr. Barker's company for a couple of months longer, and should then proceed to London to commence rehearsals, so as to be ready to make her début at a favourable period of the London season. Juliet was the character fixed upon for her first appearance.

"It's hackneyed," said Mr. Allen, "but

there's nothing better. Above all, as you're so young, why the very idea of a Juliet under forty will be an attraction of itself."

Mr. Barker, a good-natured man enough, and very willing to oblige his metropolitan brother-manager, had promised that Mabel should have more than one opportunity of playing Juliet before leaving Dublin. As he could not keep the young actress in his own theatre, he had no objection to make her farewell performances as brilliant as possible.

"Well, all the world is going to London, I declare!" said Mrs. Walton to her niece. "There's young Trescott, and yourself. Fancy that rich old lady taking him to town with her. They say that she expects him to do wonders in the musical world."

"And so he will, Mary!" said her husband.

"No doubt of it," cried Jack.

"We shall see," said Janet.

"But our Mabel is *sure* to succeed," said Mrs. Walton. There was a unanimous chorus of "Sure—quite sure;" whereupon Madame Bensa's baby, who was present, swelled the sound with gurgling hilarity, and crowed and kicked again.

"If I do," said Mabel, between smiling and crying, "it will be thanks to you all. Do you remember the Arabian Nights story you told me when I first came here, Uncle John? Well, but I am no such heroine as the Princess was. She had to toil up the hill all alone. Now, I have dear loving voices to cheer my way, and drown the airy sound of taunting and derision."

"I'm not sure," said Janet, musingly, "that, although the way would be drearier, a woman might not be the more likely to come to the mountain-top if she *were* all alone."

"Well, cousin Janet, perhaps that depends upon what she wants to find when she gets to the summit. The magic tree has different sounds for different ears. And mine whispers me, waving its branches and rustling its leaves melodiously, 'Here under my shade is a rest and a shelter where you may abide in peace with the hearts that love you.'"

END OF BOOK IV.

THE SPIRIT OF PROGRESS.

ANCIENT mythology states that, previous to the Iron and Silver Ages, there was one which, on account of its excellence, was called Golden, during which our planet was a paradise, and primitive man lived in a state of happy innocence. The present age has been named the Age of Brass, rather satirically, however, than philosophically; but is generally included under the term of the Iron Age, which has now endured for at least six thousand years. In the age that preceded, and which has lately received the title of pre-historic, and of which we know nothing except from the scattered tradi-

tional literature, of which we are afraid the last remnants have reached us in the Collections of Mr. Dasent and Mr. J. F. Campbell, there are vestiges of much goodness surviving in an era of Force, and serving to initiate an Intellectual cycle, the culmination of which has been reserved for the present epoch. The era of brute power was dark enough, but the cloud had a silver lining which it graciously turned forth upon the night. Nevertheless, the intellectual aspects are rude and elementary, and appear to have been as little moral as they were scientific. The social state, in the traditional records, scarcely exists, and the rights of property are slenderly regarded. At any rate, the intellectual instinct is not identified with honesty, and the law of *meum* and *tuum* is violated with impunity. The Master Thief is a clever fellow, and a leading hero in all the tales. He simply makes brute power ridiculous by the exercise of his wit, and takes advantage of the blindness and stupidity of his opponent. And power, on the part of the latter, is exerted with as little reference to morality. With power it is a mere question of overreaching or strength. Everywhere there is preoccupation by a barbarous race which the new-comers have to circumvent by skill or courage. Individual cunning or strength has to prove itself a match for numbers, and at length, whether in life or death, it conquers; in the first it is the hero who triumphs, in the second his cause.

With certain modifications, however, these tales of the past are also those of the present. Looking to facts now occurring, and to history, says one of the collectors of these old stories, traditional fictions look very true, for battles are still a succession of single combats, in which both sides abuse each other, and after which they boast. War is rapine and cruel bloodshed, as described by old fishermen in Barra, and by the Times' correspondent at Tetuan. It is not, he sagely adds, altogether the chivalrous pastime which poets have sung.

It is true that now, except with the very ignorant, iron weapons are no longer magical, horses no longer hallowed, birds no longer soothsayers, oak-trees, wells, swine, and apples no longer sacred, nor combs wonderful; yet, as among the Scythians, the Iron Sword is with many a god, and the various accessories of privileged wealth objects of great veneration. The only difference that seems to exist is that they are not so rare as in the days of the times of old when Ossian sang and Fingal fought. It was natural that the Iron Sword should be worshipped by a people with whom Iron was rare, as a mystic personage, that shone, that cried out, and wherewith the lives of men were bound up. But there is no such excuse now for the superstition, nevertheless it has still its worshippers—men and governors of states who appeal to it and perish by it, as if a supernatural virtue belonged to the material. Surely, the smith should still have his place in the pantheon of nations.

In the past, the man of the sword was a ci-

viliser. The evil powers, it was thought, could not resist iron; and these were the skin-clad warriors who shot flint arrows, and whose remains are even now traceable in various parts of Europe. We meet with them in tradition as bogles and demons, even as fairies; and the swordsman was the champion of Heaven who successfully resisted the Devil. The fiend was always painted as a fool, and got the worst of the fight. "In all probability," says the critic, "the fiend of popular tales is own brother to the Grugach and Glasban, and was once a skin-clad savage, or the god of a savage race." We know that Mahomet resisted the idolators of his age, and spread his own doctrine by means of the soldier; and long before his day the worship of the scimitar prevailed with a people who are classed with the Indo-European races, and whose influence has survived with us for more than two thousand years, and identified itself, perhaps, with all magic swords from the time of Herodotus down to the White Sword of Light of the West Highlands.

But the moral is reversed when the man of Iron has superseded the man of Stone, and in turn become himself the tyrant. It is then that Intellect separates itself from Violence, and depends on moral means for achieving moral ends. From these means fraud is gradually eliminated, for fraud is only force in a more subtle guise. Yet for a long period strength will be regarded with especial favour; nay, still is so regarded. The muscular athletes of the present day are the most popular performers at the music-halls. Leotard and Avolo are more highly esteemed than the most accomplished tenor. It is little more than a century ago since the town was thoroughly excited by the feats of a Samson of the day. It was just at the time when Admiral Vernon had achieved a great naval victory by the reduction of Porto Bello, and the capture of the seaport of Carthagena, in Spain, which last event, in those days of slow travelling, took more than a month in reaching England. A man named Topham, celebrated for his muscular power, determined to take advantage of the occasion, and announced, in honour of the victory, a grand trial of strength. On the 28th of May, 1741, the performance came off in the thoroughfare now known as Bath-street, Clerkenwell, in which street three hogsheads of water, together weighing one thousand eight hundred and thirty-six pounds, were placed on a timber frame. Standing above them, Topham, by means of a stirrup over his shoulder, fastened to a strong cord, contrived to lift the cumbrous load several inches, in the presence of Admiral Vernon himself, who had mingled with the crowd. The performance became so popular that Topham's portrait was frequent on signboards in and about the metropolis. Though only about five feet ten inches in height, this man's strength was indeed extraordinary. He could pull against a horse with his feet placed against a low wall, roll up a pewter dish with his fingers, and lift with his teeth a table six feet long, with

a half-hundred-weight attached to it. He valued himself, however, on other accomplishments; for he was acquainted with music, and his biographer heard him sing a solo to the organ of St. Wedburgh church, Derby. He adds, that "his voice, more terrible than sweet, seemed scarce human;" and also, that "the ostler of the Virgin's Inn having given him some cause of displeasure, he took one of the kitchen spits and bent it round his neck like a handkerchief." It is also recorded of him that one night, perceiving a watchman asleep in his box, he raised both from the ground, and dropped them over the wall of Bunhill-fields burying-ground. He kept once a public-house in Islington, and, being visited by two quarrelsome men who wished to fight him, he seized both by the neck, and knocked their heads together until they asked pardon. But his strength was no more security to him than it was to the heroic Hebrew who was betrayed by Delilah. Topham had an unfaithful wife, whom he stabbed in a fit of jealousy, and then slew himself.

In the Bone or Flint Age, that, rather than the silver or the golden, really preceded the Iron, Topham would have been esteemed a great man, on account of his personal strength, though he would scarcely have been reckoned a giant. Nevertheless, there has been much exaggeration in relation to the giants of old. Those of the Highlands were not so big but that their conquerors wore their clothes; nor were they so strong that men could not beat them, even by wrestling. Topham himself was once beaten in a trial of strength and skill to which he was unaccustomed. At a public-house frequented by the Finsbury archers, Topham ventured to give his opinion that the long bow was a plaything fit only for a child. One of the archers laid a wager with him that he would not draw the arrow two-thirds of its length. Of course, he readily accepted the bet, assured that he should win; but, drawing the bow towards his breast instead of his ear, he was greatly mortified in being obliged to pay the forfeit, after, it is said, many fruitless efforts. For the want of knowledge, skill, and practice in the art, his strength availed him nothing. Skill places mere strength at a discount; and the giant, in the long run, proves to be merely a savage whom the more civilised man is certain to subdue.

Though we have not learned to dispense with the sword, yet we do depend more on the power and influence of that intelligence of which it was once the instrument, than they who then wielded it were accustomed to do. The soldier has been in a great measure supplanted by the savant. Steam, gas, electricity are his weapons, and with them he changes the face of the world, shaping it almost to his own will. The wonders of the old fairy tales are far surpassed by the exploits of modern scientific discoverers, and results once supposed miraculous are now produced by natural means within the comprehension of the humblest inquirer, not at wide intervals of time, but daily. Being no longer

rare, they have ceased to be surprising; and, viewed in the light of common day, have become familiar and ordinary. Other wonders have to be sought for outside the scientific circle, just like table-rapping and such inexplicable matters, in which imagination asserts some of its ancient privileges, and the faith that never dies gives substance and evidence to things hoped for and unseen. But the real miracles are still within the circle, and passing in the public life of the world, in the progress of society, in the march of events, and in the improvement of individual character. The general level is higher than at any former period, and ages lie buried beneath the ground on which we travel—faster and faster every year. The supernatural may have given way to the natural, but the natural is still more full of wonders.

The time has been, and not long since, when all this would have been esteemed "wild talk," but "now the time gives it warrant." To keep our admiration, however, within bounds, the world has grown critical. We have a critical philosophy, a critical theology, and a critical literature, the last in great abundance. With all this jog-trot, people, who would keep the even tenor of their way without questioning or being questioned, are offended. They like not interference with their creeds, their opinions, and their tastes; and less like to be called upon to form new ones. Nevertheless, the force of this intelligence alone, with nothing but moral influence for its weapon, is stronger than that of the Sword or Scimitar, and will, like Truth, prevail, and finally substitute a better system of things for that which is passing away. It would appear, indeed, that the Ages of Silver and Gold belong rather to the Future than to the Past; that they have not come, but are coming. Or if referable to former states of being, they imply rather the pre-existence of the philosophers and poets than the earthly paradise of the cosmogonist, if indeed they have not the same meaning, which is probable. If this be true, they still continue to exert a mysterious energy on the world of progress in which we live, as eternal impulses perpetually urging on the mind to novel efforts and greater excellence. If we had no real reason to dread this civilising intelligence when aided by carnal weapons, we have still less to dread it now that it aims at all manner of reformations without it. It has still its work to do as a civilising agent. There are still fairies and giants in popular superstition quite as bad if not worse than those that the Sworded civiliser had to contend with. There are parts of the earth, too, suffering still from the ancient darkness which has been only partially dispelled. But we have the experience of the past to guide us in the present, and from this we learn that we have only to allow perfect liberty to the intelligent factors now at work in every direction to secure for the future that development of the human in each individual by which he is made a good and rational member of society. It is to Education that we must trust the destinies of peoples and nations; and

let the proper training begin early in life, so shall the best secure the result, and make "the Child the Father of the Man."

THE MODERN JOSHUA.

A TYNESIDE TALE.

I.

To drag the wheels of Time, and stay their rolling,
While at their usual speed they rattle by,
Like railway trains that never wait for coaling,
But on their course swift as an arrow fly,
Has proved a problem beyond man's controlling,
Though some men have been bold enough to try;
And Joshua thereby gained high renown,
Through whom the sun was stayed from going down.

II.

King Mycerinus* stole a march on Time
(Herodotus relates, 'mong other scandals),
Spending his years in revelry sublime,
And turning night to day with countless candles;
Tom Moore, whose wit is ever in its prime
When wine and wassail are the theme he handles,
Sings that, to clog his wings, each jolly soul
Should seize old Time, and scouse him in the bowl.

III.

"Necessity's the mother of invention,"
The proverb says; but as her father's name
Has ne'er been brought to light, 'tis my intention
To that paternity to urge the claim
Of one, whose 'cuteness I'm about to mention,—
A modern Joshua, all unknown to fame,
Who late, without a miracle to brag on,
Contrived the wheels of Time to clap a drag on.

IV.

A northern vicar, whose extensive parish
Shows population scant, and hamlets rarish,
Rode forth one day to its remotest border,
To see his distant flock were all in order;
To warn the careless, and to cheer the sighing,
Relieve the poor, console the sick and dying,
Reprove Job White for that last drunken frolic,
Prescribe some "doctor's stuff" for Mr. S's colic,
Rebuke the loungers at the "Cat and Whiskers,"
For boozing half the night and smoking all the pipes;
To write to London about Smith's "Solid Pen-
sion."

To act as Makepeace in some dire dissension,
Collect the club-pence of each thrifty matron,
And blow up those who let their payments late run;
To see about a "place" for Coulson's daughter,
Where she may practise all his wife has taught her;
To urge Joe Scott to send his lads to school,
Instead of hunting rats in "Miller's Pool;"
In short, discharging all those various duties
Which bind him to his flock with ever new ties;
Making the priest round every village steeple
The friend, adviser, pastor, of his people;
While through the whole he works the gospel
leaven,
Teaching men, still on earth, to live for heaven.
But to my tale, which all this time is waiting,
As if my Pegasus had stopped for baiting.

V.

The church was decked at morning-tide,
The bridesmaids fluttered fair,
And bride and groom wait side by side,
But where's the vicar?—Where?

* Herodotus, book ii. ch. cxxxiii.

VI.

They've sought him baith in cot and ha',
He's naewhere to be seen;
And much they fear he's rade awa'
To far off Halton Green.

VII.

Here was a fix! For twelve o'clock drew near,
While for their truant vicar they stood sighing:
That hour, by night, to ghosts and goblins dear,
By day to ardent lovers sorely trying;
Because, if soon the parson don't appear,
Until next day they must postpone his tying
In nuptial noose as man and wife their neck fast;
Then what a bore to spoil the wedding breakfast!

VIII.

Meanwhile our vicar, passing to the next on
His list of visitees, had ta'en his seat
By Molly Brown's bedside, to enlarge some text on,
Which in her present sickness he judged meet;
When, looking up, he saw Jock Graves, the sexton,
Rush to the window in a blaze of heat,
Exclaiming, breathless, as he popped his head in,
"The weddin', sur! Ye've clean forgot the wed-
din'!"

IX.

"The wedding! Careless mortal I must be!
You're right, Jock; I'd forgotten all about it."
Then, pulling out his watch, cried, "Let me see!
Shall I have time yet? No; I greatly doubt it.
However, country clocks don't all agree;
I'll have a try; there's nothing done without it.
While o'er my head there hangs, to urge a man on,
The bugbear of that Sixty-second Canon."

X.

"Suspensio per triennium ipso facto"
Is there pronounced on any luckless loon
Of parish priest, who ventures 'gainst this Act to
Unite a pair of lovers, late or soon,
Except at certain hours, laid down, hoc pacto,
"Twixt eight o'clock A.M. and twelve at noon,
Save those who show of dignity such high sense
As to provide themselves a "special license."

XI.

This was exacted in the good old days,
Which every whipper-snapper now disparages,
Its object being, as the Prayer-book says,
To hinder, as one ought, clandestine marriages.
Our honest church abhors all back-stairs ways,
Which surely lead to family miscarriages,
And by this canon brings folks to a dead lock
Who choose unlawful hours to enter wedlock.

XII.

Our vicar, not having a moment to spare,
Ran straight to the stable and got out his mare;
He sprang on her back, and he gave her the reins;
He scoured across moors, over fields, along lanes.
Dick Turpin himself didn't make shorter work
As he spurred on Black Bess in his gallop to York;
Nor did famed Tam O'Shanter, who quaked in his
breeches,
Faster urge his grey Meg as he rode from the
witches.

XIII.

Like young Lochinvar, who "came out of the west,
And through all the wide Border his steed was the
best,
He stayed not for brake, and he stopped not for
stone,
He swam"—no Esk river, because there was none;
But ere he arrived at the parish church gate,
The bride all but fainted, the priest was so late;

While the bridegroom stood threatening an action at law

'Gainst the parson who'd made such an awful faux pas.

XIV.

His heart 'gainst his ribs beating nickety-knock,
He flew into church, and he looked at the clock,
And he found that the race he had just shaved to win it;

For its hands of the hour wanted barely a minute!
He threw on his surplice, and rushed to the altar,
And "Dearly beloved" just managed to falter
Before, as he fancied, the clock had struck twelve,
Which, for that day at least, the proceedings would shelve.

XV.

The fatal hour thus closely nicked, our priest
Went on more calmly to discharge his function;
And, thankful from his fix to be released,
Performed the service with unwonted unction;
Between the happy pair, before he ceased,
Acting a kind of "copulative conjunction,"
He riveted, "for better or for worse,"
Those bonds for life a blessing, or a curse!

XVI.

The ceremony ended, they withdrew
Into the vestry next, to sign the register,
And harmless jests round bride and bridegroom flew,
As jointly thus they ratify their pledge—a stir
Kept up by bridegroom's men, a jolly crew,
Whose wits, that wedding morn, with sharpened
edges stir;
E'en the "late vicar" with their jokes they press
well,
As all but, *a priori*, rivalling Cresswell!

XVII.

"Well, let them laugh that win," rejoined the vicar,
"And in this present race I've not been loser;
George Rodham's self could scarce have done it
quicker,

Though mounted upon Mr. Rarey's Cruiser!
Upon the road I didn't stop to 'liquor,'
But o'er my fences like a bird I flew, sir,
And thanks, at last, to my good mare's assistance,
Contrived by half a head to 'save my distance!'"

XVIII.

"It's varra weel to crack about yor mere"
(Chucked the clerk, when gone were all the party),
"But if Josh Robinson had not been here,
A bonny mess there wad hae been, maw sarty!"
"What do you mean, Josh, by that roguish leer?"
"What div aw mean?" quoth Josh, with grin so
hearty;
"Twas close on twelve, sur, when aw started Jock;
So just to gie ye time—aw stopped the clock!"

OLD STORIES RE-TOLD.

THE WRECK OF THE ROTHSAY CASTLE STEAM-PACKET.

At ten o'clock on the morning of the 17th of August, 1831, the *Rothsay Castle* steamer, running between Liverpool and Beaumaris and Bangor, was getting up steam in the Mersey. The sea had been very rough the night before, so much so that an American ship towed into the offing at daybreak had prudently returned to her former anchorage. But the wind went down as the day advanced, and though there was a heavy ground-swell, there was nothing

else to alarm or delay the reckless captain of the steamer, who had one hundred and fifty sailors, engineers, and passengers in his care.

Ten o'clock was the proper time of starting, but the passengers were tardy, and at eleven a Mr. Foster arrived with his wife, servant, and carriage. This gentleman had resolved not to go by the packet, but, finding the steamer not yet started when he reached the shore, he changed his mind, and at once embarked. At nearly half-past eleven the steamer was still hanging about for dilatory passengers, but a Mr. Leigh, of Liverpool, then threatening to report the captain for his unpunctuality, he at last sullenly yielded. He moved his hand, the engines heaved and rocked, and the band, mechanically gay, began playing "Cheer up, cheer up."

The shore bell rang in petulant haste. There was much kissing and pressing of hands, and the plank was drawn in. Soon the shores receded, and the fluttering handkerchiefs and waving hands grew too small to be distinguished. As the forts were passed, the sailors began to get the steamer ship-shape, coiled away ropes, got out the sail, arranged the benches, and lowered the trunks and boxes into the hold.

The passengers were of all classes—Welsh clergymen, many ladies, London solicitors and men of business, Liverpool merchants, persons from Bury, Cheadle, and Rochdale; some Manchester tradesmen, a Birmingham Quaker, an American traveller, a Portuguese who had been secretary to Canning when he was English ambassador at Lisbon, and a land-agent of the Earl of Derby. The overworked business men were eager for the pleasure of the fresh, vigorous, and highly vitalised sea air, and the glimpses of Welsh headlands, Welsh sands, Welsh bays, and Welsh mountains.

On rounding the Black Rock, five miles from Liverpool, the tide began to flow, and the head wind settled into a strong and swelling gale. In the broader water, the steamer seemed to labour heavily, and to quiver like a frightened horse, every time a sea struck her full. Gradually, as the passengers grew sick and staggered to their cabins, a gloom fell over the vessel, and many began to listen with a sort of awe to the louder pulse of the engines, and the more angry wash of the waves, as the steamer reeled and struggled on, in a scared, confused sort of way, past the Floating Light, fifteen miles from the great Lancashire city. Dinner was served up in the cabin at three o'clock. The captain lingered long at dinner, and drank more than a good officer with a dangerous and uncertain night before him should have done. Frightened women began to ask anxiously, "When shall we reach Beaumaris?" Pale fathers and husbands only shook their heads and looked anxiously to windward.

Mr. Tarrey, a land-agent, called down the cabin stairs:

"Captain, there seems to be a great deal of danger. I wish you would turn back."

Atkinson shouted back, "There's a deal of

fear, but no danger. It's folly to go back; you'll only have the same ground to go over again."

The gentlemen in the cabin, good sailors who were able to enjoy their meal, laughed with the surly captain at the frightened landmen on deck. He then complimented two pretty girls who had remained in the cabin on their seamanship. By this time the mate had also taken more than his share of grog, and as two of the steamer's crew had been left at Bangor on the last voyage, there were only two flushed men left to work the crazy vessel. A second request was then made by those on deck, who saw what little way the steamer made, to put back to Liverpool while power still remained to do so.

The dogged captain, heedless of danger, replied mildly, "If we were to turn back with passengers, it would never do; we should have no profit."

On the confused vessel went, making very little way, her single engine beating feebly against a heavy and growing sea, much too near the land prudently to weather that great promontory of Denbighshire, the Great Ormshead. She should have been steered for the Menai Straits, with the wind fairly on her beam, her sails set in aid of the flagging steam.

A little after five, when the captain, heated and testy, returned on deck after two hours over his wine, a cluster of passengers came round him, and entreated him to return, all offering their fare, and others promising a gratuity in money. To one passenger he said, tauntingly, "One would suppose you had committed a murder, you are so frightened. I'm not one that turns back. If you knew me, you would not ask such a thing."

The sea was now forcing its way through the axles of the paddles, the engine fires were partly extinguished, and thus the steam power was reduced just when it was most needed. The cabin floors were also under water; the smeared and black-faced firemen were discussing the vessel in rather an ominous way; one said she was sixteen years old, and originally no better than a tea-chest. Old sailors had always prophesied she'd be the grave of some of them some day. Passengers are easily scared, but sailors' fears are presages.

Between six and seven the ebb tide made, and this, it was hoped, would help them on; but the vessel was more helpless than ever, going scarcely more than two miles an hour. The seams gaped wider, the engine fires grew duller as heavy seas poured down from the deck into the engine-room. The captain was down below, making evasive and contradictory answers.

"It's only the tail of a storm gone by, and there's no danger."

But at last came the confession so terrible to frightened passengers:

"I wish I could get somewhere to ride out the storm!"

All this time the lee shore was looming near. Driven landward by the wind and waves, the

Rothsay Castle had been these dreadful hours working painfully from the Hoyle sands at the mouth of the Dee, parallel to every bay and bight, till, about eight o'clock, she arrived off the Little Ormshead. From thence past the Great Ormshead (only four miles) took the wretched cranky vessel two hours; and the leakage increased as night came on. A sloop passed within a short distance, and two miles off there was good anchorage a mile from the shore; yet the infatuated captain neither signalled the sloop for help nor tried to anchor. The passage from Liverpool to Beaumaris is only fifty miles, and is generally done in six to seven hours; but this steamer had been eleven hours accomplishing thirty-six miles. The hold was now so full of water that it ran over into the cabin. The passengers began to work at the pumps in gangs, but the majority had given up all hope; for the leaks gained fast upon them, and the captain thought it dangerous to put into Conway, and had refused to push on to Penmaen, to anchor there sheltered by the Anglesea coast. The sky was at this time wild and cloudy, and through the driven clouds the moon seemed to race, often obscured and sometimes lost; and, through the sickly light, the precipice of the Great Ormshead was seen throwing its mighty shadow, blackening the mountainous waves.

The danger increased—yes, it was upon them now. The coals were drenched, and every time the furnace doors were opened the sea rushed in and dulled the fires. Eleven o'clock came, and the leaks were fast increasing. Nothing could now compose the women. The captain was in vain asked to hoist a lantern or fire a signal-gun; but he had neither gun nor lantern, and he never thought of blazing a tarred rope from the poop to bring out the Welsh fishermen.

At about a quarter to twelve land dusky gloomed on the larboard bow, and the sinking moon showed it to be Puffin Island, half a mile from Anglesea, and at the entrance of the Menai Straits. A cry of joy greeted it from the deck, for it seemed an omen of safety. There was hope now; but two of the engine-room fires were extinguished. The pumps had become blocked with ashes from the furnaces, and were useless. A brave passenger called out for buckets to bale with, but the only bucket on board had just dropped overboard. The same energetic man proposed to bale with hats, but the expedient seemed inadequate, and no one joined him in it. Now was a crisis indeed. The tide had turned, the water was getting shallow; the place was dangerous at night without constant sounding. The captain should have used his sails, or have anchored and made signals of distress; but he remained down below.

There were shoals everywhere before the vessel; the spot was indeed the very Dardanelles of the voyage, and required incessant care even for a good ship and by sunlight. Beaumaris Bay opened to the north; at the eastern entrance to it frowned the Great Ormshead, and on the west stretched the coast of Anglesea and

the great rocks of Penmaenmawr. Ten miles of sea rolled between these two gateways of the bay. To the north spread that vast graveyard of ships, the Lavan sands. The vessel's course lay up the straits leading past Beaumaris to Caernarvon and the Irish Sea. The north-east point of the dreaded Lavan sands is named (from some wreck centuries ago) the Dutchman's Bank, between which and an outlying insular shoal called the Spit there is the Wash, a very narrow channel. In the open sea the Rothsay Castle was a mere bundle of driftwood; what would it be when surrounded by shoals, and picking its way down mere lanes of deep water, with death on either side?

A little past midnight the end began. The ship had dragged along the eastern edge of the Dutchman's Bank, and, in endeavouring to recover her course, jammed on the Spit sand, stern foremost. Five minutes before, the helmsman had grimly and silently touched Mr. Broadhurst, a passenger, on the shoulder, and pointed out breakers whitening a hundred yards to larboard.

The first shock was alarming, but was not violent—a mere grating thump. Few passengers were on deck. With the second concussion there came a heavy crash as if the vessel was breaking up bodily. Then came shrieks from the women, and all in the cabin, sick or well, rushed to the stairs and struggled to reach the deck. One of the passengers saw the nails of the ship's timbers partially drawn out by the shock, and at once decided that all was lost. A Liverpool branch pilot, unnoticed before, and who had been drinking with the steward and sleeping in some hole forward, now came among the passengers, and exclaimed:

"We are all lost!"

That drove the women to absolute frenzy. Some, however, still maintained that it was only the paddle-wheel which had broken, and all would soon be well. The captain gave violent, confused, and contradictory orders. He ordered the helm "hard a-starboard," which would have driven the vessel further into the sands. The man at the helm, however, seeing the danger, thought right to port the helm; but the captain sent the mate angrily, and he took the wheel and put it a-starboard, as if determined to lose the vessel at once. The gentlemen passengers were then ordered to go first forward and then aft, in order to try and float the vessel. The paddles were ordered to be reversed, but the steam was too low to work them. Those on deck who heard these proofs of the captain's ignorance of the long-existing danger now lost all hope. The vessel was fast filling. Some persons entreated the captain to let go the anchor, and keep the vessel from driving, as the sands would soon be covered with deep water, and assistance might then arrive. His answer was:

"Hold your bother; there's no danger."

Once more the vessel was washed off it, cleared the sand, but struck again. Then she dragged herself, like a wounded, delirious crea-

ture, a mile along the bank, rolling, pitching, and bumping, till she came within two hundred yards of the Swash Channel. There the doomed wreck beat again on the sand, and lay helpless, with no motion of her own, no struggle left in her, clogged by the fatal indraught, staked to the sand by the dead weight of the lifeless engine, and ready to pour out her hecatombs of victims to man's insatiable enemy, the sea. At that last death-blow every one rushed from below. Some of the ladies remained locked in each other's arms, some tore their dress or threw away their caps and bonnets, others swooned or dashed themselves on the deck in a delirious and passionate paroxysm of terror. Many were hugging their children in the agony of parting; husbands and wives were taking leave of each other, or avowing their determination to die together. The infatuated captain still had, or pretended to have, hope. He ordered the jib to be hoisted, to wear the vessel's head round towards the Swash. He cried out that there was no danger, it was only sand she was on; she would soon float again; she was all right; she was on her way to Beaumaris.

Mr. Foster was now asked, by request of the passengers, if he would allow his carriage to be thrown overboard; he at once consented; but while some property of value was being removed from it, the captain interfered, giving it as his opinion that the weight was rather beneficial than otherwise to the wreck. The captain was then asked to let the bell be rung to alarm Beaumaris. He said:

"If they wanted it rung, they might ring it themselves."

The bell was rung till the tongue was broken; then it was beaten with a piece of wood and with bits of coal. At this crisis a seaman deliberately took out the binnacle lamp and broke it into pieces on the deck. The captain, at last aroused, was trying the depth of the water alongside with a pole, and found it to be seven feet.

The wreck now dashed about in its death-gasp. The stays of the ponderous chimney had long ago given way, but had been secured again by the crew and passengers. They soon again yielded to the rocky strain, and the loosened tube swung to and fro, threatening to sweep away all in its fatal neighbourhood. At last it fell, tearing away the mainmast, and both struck across the poop and starboard quarter with hideous crashes that sounded like the roar of a sundered iceberg. The bulwarks on the side of the fall were shattered into fragments. It is supposed the captain and mate both perished at this time, as they were never seen again on deck. The passengers were now praying, alone or in groups. The crew were carefully watched to see what they would do, but they, too, were all but hopeless. Three lashed themselves to the top of the foremast, some stripped and prepared for swimming, others tried to collect materials for rafts. Two men got hold of a big drum, but there was a discussion about their

inequality of size. Both men perished, and the drum was afterwards seen, burst and abandoned to the waves. Some of the passengers, in paroxysms of irresolution and terror, moved restlessly from place to place. Mr. Tarrey, whose wife and five children were on board, at first agitated, had now grown calm, resolute, and resigned. He said:

"To return without my family would be worse than death. Yes, I will die with them."

The storm was now increasing, the moon had gone down, a solitary star in the black vault above and the phosphorescence of the turbulent sea were the only light. Many persons clung to the iron under the plank that passes from one paddle-box to another. The windlass and the belfry were also seized with avidity as points of resistance to the waves. Hughes, one of the seamen on the foremast, let go his child's hand when he began to climb, and the boy (a fine fellow of about twelve) sobbed and shrieked, "Father, father, save me!" But in vain; despair has no heart. In the midst of all this horror, however, one poor woman, a carpenter's wife, seemed to entirely forget herself, and was absorbed in her anxiety for an infant at her breast.

There had been a rush to the ship's boat, till a sailor called out that there were no oars, and that there was a hole in the bottom of it. The boat then broke away at one end, and hung by the other. The carpenter's wife, who still clung to it, was rescued by some of the passengers. This poor loving mother instantly begged a gentleman near her to wrap her shawl closer round her to prevent the water touching the child. Even when she sank a short time afterwards, she was seen holding the child up above the waves, careless of all but that.

While Mr. Selwyn and other passengers were praying, some one exclaimed:

"There's a light on Puffin Island!"

Everybody at once sprang to their feet and shouted; but when no answer came but the impatient roar of the sea, some returned to their prayers, others wept, and many agonised each other by mutual accusations as to who had prompted the fatal voyage.

And now came the climax of horror. The ship began to part, and the two trembling masts leant one way, the stern the other. A tremendous wave rolled and leaped over the vessel, striking and splitting and washing away to leeward. The frightened crowd clung together. There was a deathlike silence. Their heads almost touched the water. Their collective weight broke away railings and stanchions, benches and bulwarks, and they all passed into the yawning sea. There was one deep-drawn sigh, one spasmodic, choking, simultaneous gasp; they struggled and writhed in a whirlpool, and then sank.

A side plank first yawned open, and then the deck sank to the level of the sea. Another wave succeeded this. Mr. Tinne says he then found himself on the mast, with the steward, his wife, and, he thinks, a child. The steward's wife was

exhausted, and her husband was trying to encourage her. Mr. Tinne then left the mast, and swam to some other spars on which were two persons. He could see a raft in the distance with eight or nine persons on it. Stunned for a moment by floating pieces of wreck, Mr. Tinne dived every time a drift approached, and cautioned his companions to do the same. Presently a vast mass rolled over him, and when he again looked up he was alone. A little girl named Tarrey, whose family had already been drowned, was seen tossed about the quarter-deck, repeatedly dashed against the gunwale, and then sucked back by the waves to be again beaten and tossed. She kept crying piteously: "Oh! won't you come to me, father? Oh, mamma!" till she was washed away.

A Mr. Nuttall, who also fell when the bulwark gave way, weary of suffering, reclined his head on the water, and waited to sink. At that moment the side of the packet came floating by, and he succeeded in getting on it and resting on his knees. While doing this, the little boy the seaman had forsaken caught hold of him, and mounted on his back with the inexorable clutch of despair. Mr. Nuttall, unable to swim, heavily clad, and thus encumbered, did not abandon hope. By dint of a rope washed near him, he contrived to get to the poop, and place the boy within reach of the wheel. Just then he heard a cry, and looking over the side of the wreck saw a woman clinging. She was trying to climb, but seemed about to fall back into the sea. He caught her by her hair, which was loose to the wind. He then got a firmer hold, and dragged her up on the poop. Another person then drew her to the wheel, and broke her bonnet-strings, her bonnet being full of water and nearly choking her. They then rescued a Mr. Coxhead, who had been hanging for a quarter of an hour to some ropes at the stern, dashed against the vessel with every sea. They kept his head from the water, which was knee-deep on the raft; but he seemed to be dying. Every wave now washed one or more survivors from the poop. The platform on which the wheel was soon sank into the water, fastened only by cordage, which the Liverpool pilot and six other survivors severed. They then floated clear. There were on this raft, only three square yards wide, a lady, four gentlemen, the pilot, and the sailor's son.

While all this was passing in the stern, there were terrible scenes also in other parts of the vessel. A musician and another man clambered into the dickey of Mr. Forster's carriage. They were opposing a third man, who had just got a seat, when a wave swept the carriage into the sea. The last comer, a Mr. Hammond, got astride of a plank, which was, however, instantly seized by another drowning man. For half an hour these two men silently struggled for the plank, the success of the one always unseating the other. The second man at last grew worn-out, fainted, fell off the plank, and was seen no more. Mr. Hammond then re-

sumed his seat, and floated safely till day-break.

Mr. Lawrence Duckworth has left a vivid picture of the horrors of that night. He and some fifty others still clung to the wreck, and, before one by one died and dropped away, his ear grew so familiar with the awful indications of death under such circumstances, that he knew when the fatal moment was approaching. "There was," he observes, "a hissing sound made by their lengthened gasps, which became more and more laborious, and ended in a short convulsion. The body became quickly rigid, and the clutch of the hands was more unyielding than in life." An old man died first, and the waves took him off his feet. He had hold of the binnacle and of Mr. Duckworth. This threatened to involve Mr. Duckworth in the fate of the old man, for the additional distress which such a burden occasioned was very severe; and it was not without great difficulty that he at length shook him off—or, rather, tore him away—for the portion of Mr. Duckworth's clothes, by which he held when living, was retained in his lifeless grasp. Mr. Foster's servant was the next victim, and Mr. Duckworth was reduced to the painful necessity of using similar means to disencumber himself of the body. The man above him, too, after a struggle of amazing duration, considering the ceaseless exertion which his trying situation required, died in the same horrible manner as the unhappy beings just described; and, as with them, his hands retained the grapple which had been strongly put forth in the pangs of death, and it was some time before the waves tore him from the rope and freed Mr. Duckworth from the horror and danger of frequent and violent contact with the body.

One by one the survivors were taken away, till only Mr. Duckworth and the three sailors on the mast were left. Dreading the rising tide, Duckworth called to them to fling him a rope that he might raise himself; but they refused, and in a few minutes an immense sea broke over the wreck, with a force which threatened at once to shatter it to atoms. On partially recovering from this terrible shock, Mr. Duckworth saw that the mast was gone. It had been swept away to some distance from the wreck, to which, however, it was attached by some ropes, and the three men were still fastened to the places they occupied when the spar was erect.

Twice only during the night Duckworth felt hopeless: first, when his wife was torn from him; then, when the mast fell and left him alone. But the prevailing impression upon his mind during so many hours of trial was, that he should eventually be saved; and this impression, it seems, which no doubt instrumentally contributed to save him, had been made by a dream he had the night before he embarked in the Rothsay Castle. "This dream," says Mr. Duckworth, "which I thought nothing of when I arose from the slumber in which it was presented, occurred to me from time to time while I was upon the wreck; it forced itself

upon my recollection when my companions were dropping on every side of me into the sea:

Methought the billows spoke, and told me of it;
The winds did sing it to me.

It was with me when I was alone—when I seemed, indeed, shut out from the living and engulfed by surrounding waters. I thought still of my dream, and gave it literal interpretation, believing it sent by Providence to afford me a sustaining assurance of protection and ultimate deliverance from peril."

Nearly half an hour after the foremast fell, Mr. Duckworth's heart leaped for joy to see a boat near Penmaen Point. His eyes were on it; she was steering for the Sound! No, thank God, it was for the wreck. Duckworth then shouted to the men on the mast to keep up their spirits. It afterwards appeared that, about five o'clock, a pilot on Penmaen Point had seen through his glass what he considered was a fishing-vessel trolling over the Dutchman's Bank, towards Conway Bay. It surprised him, however; he looked keener, and saw it was a mast with men clinging to it. The mast fell five minutes after; had he looked those few minutes later, the four men would have been lost. Two other pilots then joined him, launched a boat and bore down the two miles to the wreck. They were astonished at Duckworth's escape, and with difficulty got him into the boat; the three sailors were found in a knot, with their arms laced for united warmth and protection. Believing all the rest had perished, the boat steered for Beaumaris; near this place the pilot picked up Mr. Tinne insensible, but holding tightly to a spar.

In the mean time the poop-deck raft was overcrowded, and there was a fear that it would sink. Mr. Coxhead had recovered consciousness in time to see eight or nine persons drop off one after the other from the mainmast, and a Mr. Hammond was rescued and drawn upon the raft after some objections for fear of overcrowding. They then paddled the raft towards Conway, and Miss Whitehead, almost naked as she was, lent her white petticoat, for the double purpose of sail and signal. Two men held up this, while four others worked at the paddles. The Penmaen boat did not see them, but they had hope now, for they could see the smoke of houses and discern people walking in the Caernarvonshire fields. Presently a life-boat pushed out of Beaumaris. Mr. Walker, a young collegian, had seen them through a telescope from Beaumaris-green.

"Help the lady first," was the sailors' cry. They placed her in the boat, wrapped in their jackets. Mr. Whitehead was nearly dead, so he was lifted in next. The first exclamation of one of the life-boat men, when he heard the wreck was the wreck of the Rothsay Castle, was:

"I knew this would be the end of her; I left her last week on that account."

The bodies, as they were washed on shore, were placed in the Shire-hall, till they could be

claimed and removed for interment. Twenty only had been saved out of the gay, light-hearted one hundred and fifty that had started from Liverpool.

The loss of this steamer caused a profound sensation through Lancashire and a great part of Wales. It led to greater precautions against wreck being taken on board the Mersey steamers, and several worn-out boats were removed before government could examine and condemn them. In August, 1832, the *Eisteddfod*, or meeting of the Welsh bards, was held in Beaumaris, and the Duchess of Kent and the Princess Victoria awarded the prizes. The chief medal was given for the best ode on the wreck of the *Rothsay Castle*. The duchess and princess also visited the spot upon which the steamer was lost, and took a great interest in the catastrophe. Many wrecks have involved greater loss of life, but no wreck of the last century has, perhaps, been described more fully, or from more points of view, sixteen educated survivors having written their fullest recollections of their various modes of escape.

INFLUENCE OF TASSO ON MILTON AND SPENSER.

MILTON has been accused by more than one Italian writer of having taken an Italian poem, published in the year 1590, as the groundwork of his *Paradise Lost*. The name of that poem is *The Angeleida*; the author, Erasmus di Valvazone. Maffei unhesitatingly asserts that Milton borrowed from it. The *Angeleida* consists of three cantos, in which the contest between the good and the fallen angels is described. We know that Milton was a good Italian scholar, and that he visited Florence, Rome, and Naples, about the year 1639. The first edition of the *Paradise Lost* was published in London in the year 1667. Maffei says:

"It has been most reasonably supposed by critics that Milton turned the *Angeleida* to account to weave (per tissere) his *Paradise Lost*, and certainly in the arrangement and disposal of his plot there is great similitude between these two poets; the language used by the leaders of the adverse factions, and the idea of a regular battle with various chances, especially the quaint idea of making the rebel angels use artillery, which is the case in both poems, make us suspect that Milton must have seen the *Angeleida*."

Hallam makes no mention of the *Angeleida*. He says, respecting Milton: "In the numerous imitations, and still more traces of elder poetry which we perceive in *Paradise Lost*, it must be always kept in mind that he had only his recollection to rely upon. His blindness seems to have been complete before 1654; and I scarcely think that he had begun his poem before the anxiety and trouble into which the public strife of the Commonwealth and of the Restoration had thrown him gave leisure for immortal occupations. Then the remembrance of early reading came over his dark and lonely path like the

moon emerging from the clouds. Then it was that the muse was truly his; not only as she poured her native inspiration into his mind, but as the daughter of memory, coming with fragments of ancient melodies, the voice of Euripides, Homer, and Tasso." We have in vain looked through Sismondi and Guinguené for some mention of the *Angeleida*. The influence of Tasso upon Milton, on the other hand, is undeniable. He occupied the same rooms, formerly the dwelling of the Italian poet, at the house of Manso, Marquis de Villa, at Naples. Manso wrote a life of Tasso, to which Milton alludes in his poem *Mansus*:

*Describis vitam, moresque et dona Minervæ
Æmulus illius, Mycalen qui natus ad altam
Rettulit Æoliū vitam facundus Homeri.*

Black, in his preface to his *Life of Tasso*, makes the following trite observations: "The *Life of Tasso* is worthy of a long detail, not merely on account of his own eminence, but from the influence of his writings on the best of our own bards. Even to literary men, the Italian language is, in general, not like the French, quite familiar; and, in spite of all that has been effected, much still remains to be done, before we shall have become sufficiently acquainted with the masters of the fathers of our poetry; yet, till this be done, we shall have but a comparatively imperfect notion of the noblest production of English literature."

The influence of Tasso upon Milton is a subject for much interesting investigation. Manso was a warm admirer of Tasso, and doubtless, extolled his merits. The imagination of our great bard may have been fired by the fame achieved by the Italian poet. Whilst a guest in Manso's house, Tasso, at the request of his host's mother, commenced an epic poem, scarcely known in England, entitled *The Creation*. His aim was to sing in exalted verse the wonders of the seven days. In the fourth canto of the *Jerusalem Delivered*, Satan invokes a council to concert measures to help the infidels against the Christians. If we turn to the second book of *Paradise Lost*, we find a description of a council held by Satan. A comparison of the two is interesting.

In the ninth canto of *Jerusalem Delivered*, Tasso soars to the most daring description. When the battle between the Christians and Pagans is at its height, but undecided, the Creator sends for the Archangel Michael, and orders him to disperse the evil spirits who favour the infidels. Milton's description of the Deity, in the third book of *Paradise Lost*, is very similar. Dante shrank from describing the Almighty. Led by Beatrice, he is allowed a glimpse of the great mystery of the hypostatical union of Christ's human nature with his divine being. Spenser is supposed to have borrowed largely from Tasso; but it may with equal justice be said, that Ariosto and Tasso borrowed from Homer and Virgil. In addition to the *Jerusalem Delivered*, Tasso wrote a poem entitled *Rinaldo*. The *Valley of Despair*, in the eleventh canto of Torquato's work, bears a re-

markable similarity to the story of the Red-Cross Knight. The Lion tamed by Clarillo, killed by Rinaldo, reminds us of the Lion attending upon Una, slain by Sansloy.

We do not endorse all the Italian critic says respecting the origin of the *Paradise Lost*; but there can be no doubt that not only the *Jerusalem*, but also the *Amadis of Gaul* of Bernardo Tasso, and the *Orlando Furioso* of Ariosto, exercised considerable influence upon the mind of our great epic poets.

GUESS!

IN FIVE CHAPTERS. CHAPTER I.

"UGH! my native climate, what a Beast you are!"

Edward Pringleston had just crossed the Channel. He was twenty-four years old, and the son of a Leicestershire county-court judge.

It is often thought to be a good thing that the eldest of a large family should be a girl, and be trained from infancy to act as a deputy slave-driver. But Mrs. Pringleston never regretted the sex of *her* eldest child, "Edward always was *such* a good boy." When he went to school there was a very sensible increase of noise from the nursery department, and for the first time Mr. and Mrs. Pringleston began to think that perhaps they had incurred a troublesome responsibility in having ten children. At school Edward was regarded as "the steady boy" by the authorities, and as "a grind" by his companions. No one took any liberties with him, however, and not one single scrape occurred to trouble the parental ears. Of the many home conferences held over his career, "Edward was sure to do well," was the invariable and, if vague, very comfortable result.

But with a high degree at Oxford, Edward seemed to have exhausted his energies for the time being. He showed no special inclination for any pursuit. He did not care for the law, so the elder Pringleston's interest was exerted in favour of the younger boys; and, indeed, the judge was very well content that Edward should rest on his oars for the present. There was no necessity for immediate decision, as he himself was a hale man of fifty-five, and good for many years. Besides, there could be no anxiety about the ultimate success of a first-class man. The judge had been no scholar himself, and reposed an undue confidence in the might of learning. And then Edward had rather overworked himself at Oxford, and felt he had honourably earned the right of resting.

But, somehow, he was low spirited, and his mother grew anxious. The family-doctor said, "Send him to Paris for a fortnight." Mrs. Pringleston objected that it was so cold, travelling in January; but she was not listened to, and Edward went to Paris. And perhaps it was as good a sign as his friends could have desired of his having enjoyed his trip, that he made that uncivil remark about the climate as he got into the train at Folkstone at half-past eight o'clock A.M.

It had been trying to snow all night, and also trying to thaw. The result was mud by the ton, universal damp, and universal ill temper.

As Edward Pringleston got into a carriage with a large balance of sickness still in hand, wet through with the January seas and snows, and turned a mottled face towards the window where the dirty down train was faintly visible through the steamed glass, he felt, indeed, that his cup of misery was full. The entrance of a widow and a little girl about two years old caused it to overflow.

He established himself next to the furthest door, and erected a fortification of shawls, bags, and a deal box marked "Fragile," containing a clock from the Palais Royal (a purchase he had since heartily regretted), between himself and the intruders. Go to sleep he *must*, so up went his feet into the opposite seat, and in five minutes he was in "paradise."

But he was a light sleeper, and very soon became aware that his companions were holding a conference in whispers.

"Baby will look out of that window, mamma," said a small but energetic voice.

"No, no, darling!" said mamma; "it will wake the gentleman. The poor tired gentleman, baby! Look out of this window, dear. You can see the pretty snow out of this one."

But baby was not to be so deluded.

"Baby can see the snow out of the other, too," she said; and the little wilful mortal ran away from her mother, and, using the sacred deal box as a step, actually mounted on to the bridge formed by the stranger's legs to get a better view of the prospect.

Edward did not in the least care to be thought extraordinarily polite and good natured. It gave him no pleasure to make sacrifices, and he was quite satisfied with knowing privately that he was as ready to make one if it were necessary as any one else. His very gallantry was a measured thing. He would give up his seat to a lady, but so he would to a gentleman if he were tired. On the present occasion he was outraged, and turned his head towards the mother in resentment. She was young, scarcely older than himself; and she was pretty, too, but it made no difference to him. It was a clear case of injustice.

"Baby, baby, come down, darling!" cried mamma; "please excuse her, sir. She has been very much indulged, and she doesn't understand that she is not to worry strangers."

All this time Edward had been considering the small person on his legs. She was very tiny, very plump, and had that perfect shapelessness which is so delightful in a child. Her arms had still the infantine creases at the wrists and elbows, and she frequently examined her marvellous little hands and pointed nails, displaying great anxiety about their cleanliness. She had a roguish mouth, which she often pursed up persuasively, and a pair of romantic blue eyes, which had, comically enough, an expression of the deepest pathos.

The result of Edward's investigation was this answer to the lady:

"Oh, never mind her! She doesn't inconvenience me. Let her stay if she likes." As she evidently did like, her mother let her stay.

Edward had now to undergo a complete examination. His waistcoat-buttons were counted, his cravat was untied, and his collars were turned down. Then the little intruder betook herself to his face, and poked her small fingers into every corner. She took hold of his eyelashes to open and shut his eyes, and arranged his hair in a very novel style. And he actually smiled at these indignities, for he found it very pleasant to have that absorbed little face so near his, and those marvellously soft little fingers touching him so lightly. She tired of the amusement sooner than he did, and presently began to clamour for her "paints."

It seemed she was a great hand at the fine arts, and Edward was obliged to get out at the next station to procure some water to moisten the said paints, and a copy of the Illustrated London News on which to exercise her skill in the art of colouring. The pictures of ships and public buildings were soon disposed of. She adopted a very broad style with them. Some of her paints she held in greater estimation than the rest, and these were not employed unless the picture were a favourite. Others were considered very ordinary tints, and were generally dashed all over uninteresting subjects without the slightest reference to nature. The Governor-General of India was painted a deep blue; and a meeting at Exeter Hall a brilliant yellow; but "the Paris Fashions for January," represented by three or four surprised-looking ladies and an elderly child, required the artist's grave consideration. She finally consulted Edward.

"What's that?" she inquired, pointing to one of them.

"That's a lady," said Edward; "give her a green gown. Hallo! that's going on to her fingers." And he put out his hand to guide the too-busy pencil.

"What's that?" said she again.

"That's her bonnet. Let's make that red."

"Where's the red?"

"Here it is. Now then. Black hair, here's the black. And now her face. Rosy cheeks."

"Where's the rosy?" the small person asked again; and, having been shown it, she went on with a vigour that did not promise a long continuance of her exertions. And, indeed, a sudden pause very soon took place. Baby was getting very much bored.

At this point mamma began to fumble in a bag. Edward had long felt impelled to open his bag, and now he could no longer resist doing so. In that bag was one of Boissier's masterpieces—a lovely bonbonnière which he was carrying home to his own little sisters. Poor little sisters! they were obliged to content themselves with British "goodies;" but he could not regret his gift when he saw how tightly it was held by its new possessor; and her little face, nodding to him out of a cab window, became one of those memories which

we stow away for years, ready to bring out and lovingly pore over, again and again.

CHAPTER II.

EDWARD'S fellow-traveller, Mrs. Stalman, was the widow of the Rev. Allan Stalman, vicar of Spikehurst, Kent. She was of a good family, though a very poor one, and, the Rev. Allan having nothing but his country living worth two hundred pounds a year, she had been well accustomed to poverty all her life. She had met her husband in Malta, where her father's regiment was quartered, and that small place had had a good gossip over the astounding news that she had declined to marry her cousin, John Tustin, the richest prize in the place, for the sake of a poor chaplain.

She had been very happy with the poor chaplain, and did not trouble herself much about John Tustin, who had parted from her in anger. He had gone to India she knew, and was reported to be leading a gay life there, and to be gaining rapid promotion.

The Rev. Allan Stalman died. Every one in Spikehurst was very kind to his widow, but Spikehurst was not a large place, and she could not live on kind words alone. Nor, had she any idea of living on the bounty of others. Consequently, Mrs. Stalman roused herself in her deep affliction, and, instead of posing in the eyes of Spikehurst as a desolate widow with a fatherless child, proceeded to realise her possessions, and travelled up to London with a modest wardrobe and three hundred pounds in money.

She had been a great musical performer in the Malta days, and had managed to keep her powers tolerably unimpaired, even in the unappreciative circles at Spikehurst. She was so fortunate as to obtain the post of musical teacher in two good schools near London, and that of organist in a church. An old friend, who was much in her own plight (minus the three hundred pounds), was glad to join with her in renting a small house, which offered "Apartments for a Single Gentleman;" and thus Mrs. Stalman managed to live in great respectability.

In London, six years had passed more rapidly over Mrs. Stalman's head than they had over Edward Pringle's. With him, that time had dragged itself away in unsettled purposelessness. He had seen the usual incidents that occur in a large family, grow and develop. One of the boys had gone to sea; another, first to the bad and then to Australia. Most of the boys had got into debt a little, but had repented and were now doing well. And then his eldest sister, who was to have made the grand match to my Lord Sharklin, was met at the very church door by the genuine peer, and saw her impostor bridegroom shrink away, never to return.

In all these troubles, Edward's clear head was in constant requisition. A fellowship at Oxford had procured him independence, and what wonder if, in the midst of all these difficulties, he had reached his thirtieth year without making any mark?

At that time, came that break which is often

the first great shock in a family. Mr. Pringle-son's death was sudden. He had sat in his little court and discharged his usual duty, and next day that court had no judge. Our Oxford fellow could not now indulge in dreams. The father was dead, and the mother must be kept. Thus it was that he came to London to fill a mastership at Duke's College, and, looking out for lodgings, knocked at Mrs. Stalman's door. As it was one of his school-days, he concluded all arrangements, and had actually been three days in possession of his rooms without being aware of his landlady's identity.

He was sitting at his breakfast one morning, when he heard a regular and peculiar noise on the stairs outside. While puzzling over it, a voice called from below:

"Miss Laura! That ain't you a-battledoring and shuttlecocking again, is it? And after all your ma said, and you know you oughtn't to it. Come down directly, miss!"

The voice had become louder as its owner ascended the stairs, and now there followed a sharp sound and a cry of distress. Miss Laura was receiving manual correction.

Edward opened his door in a hurry.

"What are you beating that child for?" he said to the aggressor, who was a very grimy servant.

"Why, sir, she's been told 'undreds of times she ain't to make that noise, but it ain't of no use. She won't mind one bit."

"Do you suppose knocking her about will do any good?" said Edward, whose eyes were angrily observing a red mark on the child's wrist where the servant had clutched her, and a black smear on the back of her hand inflicted by a blacking-brush. Taking out his handkerchief to remove this smear, he noticed the hand, which was peculiar, more closely. He looked at the child, and with a sudden exclamation drew her into his room and shut the door.

This unexpected move rather astonished her, and though she looked Edward straight in the eyes with a defiant air, there were certain little signs that she was not altogether easy in her mind. Edward had by this time satisfied himself that his little heroine of the train stood before him. His first remark was highly diplomatic, intended to elicit a final proof, and also to introduce a pleasing subject.

"Do you like sugar-plums *now*?" he asked.

It was a complete success. The child had a very pliant and expressive figure. In an instant its defiant rigidity disappeared, and she approached a thought nearer, before answering "Yes," in a shy whisper.

Edward sat down by the fire, and she leaned against one of his knees.

"Now," said he, "if I were to find some sugar-plums what would you do?"

She was a practical person, and so inquired:

"If you was to find them for me?"

"Yes, for you. What would you do with them?"

"Give mamma some, and Miss Price some, and me some."

That evening Mrs. Stalman received a message

from her new lodger begging to see her. This ending in an invitation from Mrs. Stalman to tea, Mr. Pringle-son came down to her room with a packet in his hand. The fellow-travellers recognised each other at once, and Laura was sent to find the identical bonbonnière, which had been carefully preserved. Edward's packet soon refilled it, and for the second time it became a bond of friendship.

Laura was now eight years old, and beginning to be a care to her mother.

"What *am* I to do about her, Mr. Pringle-son?" she asked, one evening; "she is beginning to get a big girl now, and her education ought to be attended to. She spells shockingly, and I fear she never will write well. I cannot spare time to teach her, if I were able, and yet I don't like schools. What shall I do?"

Edward was really younger than Mrs. Stalman, but she was beginning to look up to him as family umpire.

"Don't send her to school," he answered.

"You think not? But how else she is to learn anything, I don't know. Poor Eliza Price has enough on her hands, looking after the house, besides being no great scholar, I am quite sure Laura would never mind a word from her."

It was a difficult question. Edward Pringle-son was engaged in looking over a pile of examination-papers. The particular note-book under his scrutiny required much revision. Its owner, who wrote an untidy sprawling hand, and signed his name with irritating illegibility as "W. Payne Shepherd," gave the master great trouble. Edward again and again shook his head over Shepherd's note-book, and scored it with marks of displeasure. It was a busy time; as the examinations were coming on, he could give no further attention for the moment to Laura and her education. At the end of the term he hurried out of town for rest and to see his mother, and returned in a week to make out the boys' reports. It had become a habit with him now to frequently join the circle down-stairs in the evening, and even to take his work there with him. His first evening was so passed.

"Where's Laura?" he inquired at once.

"Ah, poor Laura!" sighed mamma, "I shall never forget her sorrowful little face as she went away! I have been obliged to act without consulting you, as I should have liked, Mr. Pringle-son. But time pressed. Mrs. Welling, the wife of my dear Allan's successor in the Spikehurst living, is really a very nice person, and, on hearing of my difficulties, wrote in the kindest manner and offered to take Laura as a pupil. She has no children of her own, and, as they are not well off, will be glad of both salary and occupation. You don't look pleased, Mr. Pringle-son! I hope you don't disapprove of what I have done?"

"Oh dear no. Of course you have the first right over the little woman, and no doubt you have done the best for her."

"Oh, but dear me!" cried the widow, who was very accessible to doubts, "I should be

quite uncomfortable if I thought you were dissatisfied. And, of course, you are such a judge of tuition! But, you see, I was obliged to decide, for Mrs. Welling could only give me three days, and at the very last moment I wrote and said the child should go."

"Pray don't apologise, Mrs. Stalman," said Edward, half laughing, "for disposing of your own child. Little folks must learn to spell, I suppose."

He did not look at all happy, however, and W. Payne Shepherd's report coming under his consideration, received no mercy.

CHAPTER III.

"PRINGLESON! You in an omnibus! I thought you would as soon have thought of wearing a wide-awake in London, as foregoing your Saturday afternoon's walk."

The omnibus was going past the Temple gate, and the speaker had emerged from that portal, and now took a seat beside his friend.

"Ah!" answered Mr. Pringleson, "I have been doing a more extraordinary thing than riding in an omnibus. What do you think of my having been to take stalls for this new piece at the Lyceum?"

"My dear Pringleson! Have you come into a fortune?"

"No," said Mr. Pringleson, with rather a perplexed look, out into Chancery-lane, up which they were passing; "but my landlady's daughter has just come home for good, and I am redeeming an old promise. It feels rather odd, though."

"Oh! You are getting a young fellow at last! It really is time you gave way to a little rashness. Why, dear me, I can remember when you first went to Duke's College, and had those boys in one of the low classes, you were like a fellow of fifty-five. Yet you couldn't have been very old, for I consider you a young man now."

"Ah, my dear fellow! I met a man to-day who made me feel rather old, though. At that very time you speak of, there was a boy in my class named Shepherd—a lazy young dog, too, who gave me endless trouble. Well, a card was brought to me as I was preparing to leave this afternoon, with 'Mr. W. Payne Shepherd' on it, and in came this identical fellow. I shouldn't have known him. He has shot up far above me—and I am not a short man—and has a great moustache with long waxed points to it; a thing I hate. He was exceedingly civil, but he had not been talking to me three minutes before I should have liked to box his ears. Odd antipathies one takes, to be sure!"

When Mr. Pringleson sat by the fire opposite Mrs. Stalman, waiting for dinner that evening, he forgot his odd antipathies; and the look of loving pride which overspread the mother's face was reflected in his as they both watched Laura.

Her tall straight figure looked wonderfully graceful as she stood with her back to them

before a pier-glass, trying the effect of a rose in her hair. Edward watched the hands that he knew so well. But they did not work altogether to their owner's satisfaction. He could see the reflexion of the face, with its distressed eyes and knitted brows, and in a few moments there was the unmistakable sound of a very small stamp.

"Bother!" she exclaimed deliberately, and then turning round with a defiant look, as if she dared remonstrance, said, "Mamma dear, I really can *not* make this thing do."

"Well, darling, put it away then," said indulgent mamma.

"Yes, dear; but what am I to say to dear old Price?"

Mamma, as usual, looked in an agony of doubt at this question; and, also as usual, referred to Edward.

"Poor Eliza Price gave her the rose, Mr. Pringleson, and it would be dreadful to hurt her feelings?"

"Well, Laura," answered the umpire, "it resolves itself into a question between your appearance and Miss Price's feelings; doesn't it?"

Laura blushed, and hurrying up to the looking-glass, desperately put the rose in her hair. Then she came and sat down on a low chair between her mother and friend. This last could not help reflecting that the misfitting rose did not prevent Laura from looking very lovely. Passing his hand over his forehead, which was getting bald now-a-days, he breathed a long sigh.

When they were seated in the theatre, Laura's absorption was complete, nor did her mother often take her eyes from the stage. The play was *Ruy Blas*, and at the most important points of the story, Laura's excitement was so great that she could not refrain from clutching Edward's arm. She was drinking in every word of the scene between *Ruy Blas* and the Queen in the council-chamber, when Edward, who had been fidgeting for some time, spoke in an energetic whisper:

"You had much better contrive to sit sideways, Laura. There is a current of air from the door, and if you can manage to inhale a little of it, it may correct this abominable atmosphere."

The idea of thinking of atmosphere or health when such much graver interests were at stake on the stage! Laura decidedly shifted her arm away from the entreating hand which had been laid on it, and looked hard at the stage with a very obstinate expression. When the act was over, Mr. Pringleson took a walk about the house to cool both body and mind. In the course of this walk he encountered one of the few friends he had preserved from early days: Mr. Goldridge, Q.C. Mr. Goldridge had lately married, as his second wife, a young lady under twenty. He insisted upon presenting Mr. Pringleson to his bride, who was in a private box. She had attracted considerable attention during the evening, and, from her elaborate toilet and tortured hair, Edward Pringleson had

several times turned to look complacently on the innocent simplicity of his own neighbour. They were left alone, and Mrs. Goldridge began to talk volubly.

"I have been so amused by a little drama over there, Mr. Pringleston"—indicating an opposite box so far from the stage that he had not before noticed its occupants. "That's Miss Royle and her mamma. A great beauty, you know, and a wonderful rider. Don't you know them?"

"No."

"Dear me! Everybody knows them—knows her, at all events. A dreadful flirt! They are very rich. Mr. Royle is the great banker, you know, and she is an only daughter. There is a young man named Shepherd—in a government office, I think—who is tremendously devoted, and the popular idea is, that if she cares for any one she cares for him. He is not in the box now; he went out just as you came in here, and I have been amused to observe how cross he has made her by staring at a very pretty girl in the stalls—with a rose in her hair—next to a vacant seat—do you see? third row?"

Mrs. Goldridge took great pains to point out Laura to Mr. Pringleston.

"Ah, yes!" said he, "she is next her mother, and they are with me. That vacant seat is mine."

Mrs. Goldridge looked a little confused at her mistake, but hurried on.

"Well, she is a very lovely girl, and more than one person has been looking at her, I assure you."

Mr. Pringleston's spirits were not raised by this announcement, and he soon afterwards left her.

Laura had quite forgotten that she had been offended, and greeted him with an inquiring smile.

"What lovely lady is that up there?"

"A bride," he answered. "A certain Mrs. Goldridge."

"A bride!" repeated both his companions in a breath; and the young lady appeared to gain great additional interest in their eyes, until the rising of the curtain again held them enchained.

"By-the-by!" exclaimed Laura, as they were taking tea on their return, "we never saw Mr. Goldridge. What is he like?"

"Mr. Goldridge, Q.C., is rather short, very fat, has grey hair and whiskers, wears spectacles, was a widower, and is sixty," responded Edward.

"You are laughing, Bluebeard," said Laura, addressing him by a name she had bestowed on him in her infancy.

"No, indeed! It's perfectly true. Why shouldn't it be?"

"A young girl marry a horrible old man!" said Laura.

"I did not say he was horrible, that I remember."

"But fat and sixty!" said she, with a shudder; "besides, he *must* be horrible to have married her."

"Perhaps she married him?" suggested Mr. Pringleston.

"Then *she* is horrible. She cannot like him. And then for him to marry again!"

"I don't see why people should not marry again if they like!" said Edward.

"Bluebeard! How dare you say such shocking things! Perhaps you will say next that people need not care for one another when they marry?"

"No," said he, meditatively; "I don't say that at all."

"Well, then," said she, triumphantly, "of course they can't care for more than one person, so they ought not to marry twice."

"You think people can't care for more than one person?" he inquired.

"Of course they can't," she answered, decisively.

Laura thought a good deal about the question after she went to bed that night, and became more convinced about it than ever. Edward thought of it too, and walking up to the looking-glass, contemplated himself for some time with a gloomy expression.

"Forty-two," he said to himself; and shook his head very gloomily indeed.

CHAPTER IV.

MR. PRINGLESTON wrought himself up to the pitch of making a formal call on Mrs. Goldridge.

The failure of Royle's bank had been rumoured, and Mrs. Goldridge entertained him with a repetition of her friends' comments on the subject. What would become of the family now? People said they were utterly ruined. Miss Royle had better have lowered her tone a little, and then, perhaps, she might have been comfortably settled by this time, instead of seeing all her old admirers drop off: as they inevitably would under the altered circumstances.

Mr. Pringleston had lately mused a great deal over the poverty of Mrs. Stalman and her daughter, and had often consulted with himself how it might be diminished. He had raised his own rent (in spite of their remonstrances), but had not achieved much in doing it. His visit to Mrs. Goldridge achieved more, by setting him thinking that, so long as his dear friends were in no distress, it was better they should keep out of a world composed of Royles and Goldridges.

On reaching home, he found the house in commotion and eager for his arrival. Mrs. Stalman had known no peace since the afternoon's post had brought a solicitor's letter, announcing the decease of Colonel Tustin, who had died unmarried in India, and had left the whole of his considerable property to his cousin, Mrs. Stalman, as a mark of his forgiveness and affection. There was not much sleep under that roof for the first night; neither was rest restored to some of its inmates for many a weary night to come.

Mr. Pringleston lay awake that night, and many nights afterwards. Why? Because he

had that day come to the knowledge that he was, and that he had been for a long time, in love with Laura Stalman.

To be in love for the first time in your life at the age of forty-two, and, moreover, to feel hopelessly too old for the person you love, is a very serious matter. Of course Mr. Pringleston knew that he could never marry Laura, and tried to be very philosophical about it. Perhaps he was so, but he failed to sleep the better for it.

The Stalmans were to set up a small house to begin with, in a very different kind of neighbourhood. "Poor Eliza Price," for the first time, seemed likely to deserve her name. She was to remain in the old place and go on letting the rooms, helped out by an allowance from her old friend. So *she* had one or two sleepless nights, and went about the house with red eyes.

"And what are *you* going to do, Bluebeard?" inquired Laura, one evening, as he came in from work and found her alone. "Go away while we move, I suppose?"

"No. Why should I go away? I may as well stay and see the last of you."

"The last of us! You are coming with us, are you not?"

"Coming with you? My dear child, I have been here as your lodger. You will take no lodger now. I shall keep my old quarters here and console Miss Price."

"Oh dear, oh dear! How dreadfully clear and reasonable," said Laura, looking disconsolately into the fire. "I never thought of it before. I don't think I should have wanted so to go to the new house if I had." She went away after dinner, and did not come down again, saying she was packing books; but when Mr. Pringleston passed her door, she came out to bid him good night, and then he saw that she had been crying.

In that last fortnight of Laura's remaining at the old house, Mr. Pringleston's walks got sadly neglected. The hour and a half before dinner was too enticing, and it was "only for a fortnight," as he said to himself. Towards the end of the time he began to forget that he was forty-two.

The last day came.

"You will come and see us directly?" said Laura.

"Yes, I shall come soon, while I may," said he. "By-and-by you won't want me."

"What do you mean?"

"When you begin to get fashionable, you won't want an old rusty schoolmaster."

"Mamma, do you hear how craftily he is fishing for a compliment? I shall not make you one, sir. But *mind!* you *are* to come. I made you do what I pleased, in the train when I was a little girl, and I shall make you do what I please still."

He went to see them very soon.

Their house was pretty and fresh, and he was shown up into a tasteful drawing-room where Laura and her mother were sitting at a kettle-drum with a number of strange people. Mr. Pringleston was very shy, so he sat down and

mechanically consumed tea and bread-and-butter until people began to go, when he rose too.

"Wait five minutes," said Laura, in a low tone. He sat down very obediently till the house was cleared. Then Laura shut the door in triumph.

"Now, we will be cozy," said she. "Come out of that uncomfortable chair, you dear old Bluebeard, and come close to the fire. Oh, mamma dear! Isn't it nice to see a friend's face again? We are *so* tired of making new acquaintances," she added, looking to Edward for sympathy.

"My dear child," interposed Mrs. Stalman, "what an ungrateful speech. And after people have been so kind, and given you so many invitations!"

"Yes, I know, mamma dear; but it seems odd for people to come and see us because we have become rich. They didn't care for us when we were not rich."

"They didn't know us then, my dear; and now Mrs. Leith has introduced them to us, and it is quite a chance, even, that we know her. A most curious thing," she explained to Mr. Pringleston. "An intimate friend of poor John Tustin's in India, who saw him a fortnight before his death. She happens to be a client of the same solicitor who is acting for us, and so introduced herself."

"Very curious," said Mr. Pringleston, who had got into a dark corner, and was reflecting that Laura looked rather tired.

"If you had come in a little sooner," pursued Mrs. Stalman, "you would have met a friend: Mrs. Goldridge."

"Yes," interposed Laura, "and we are very angry that you never told us more about her. She says you are a most particular friend of hers."

Mr. Pringleston presently made another effort to leave, but was persuaded to remain and dine, as they had no engagement for that evening. His inward gratification at this arrangement was somewhat damped by the announcement: "Mr. Shepherd."

"Really it is too bad of me," that gentleman remarked, as he came in; "you ought to turn me out, after my coming yesterday; but I really couldn't help coming up, as the servant said you were in. I intended only to come to the door to ask if I had left an umbrella here, but your windows looked highly inviting, and it is just beginning to rain. Why, Pringleston! How do you do? The idea of your knowing Pringleston!"

"The idea of *your* knowing him I think more remarkable," said Laura, with a look into the dark corner where he sat.

"I was at school under him," cried Mr. Shepherd. "I used to look up to him awfully in those days, I assure you."

The rain now beginning to announce itself against the window-panes very noisily, Mrs. Stalman, under the influence of an impulse, framed and uttered a proposal which she would ordinarily have taken a week to decide upon.

"It is terribly wet, Mr. Shepherd. Mr.

Pringleston is going to stay and dine with us, en famille. If you are disengaged, I hope you will stay too."

Mr. Shepherd was delighted, and led Miss Stalman down in high spirits.

After dinner neither gentleman appeared conversationally inclined, and both repaired to the drawing-room so soon that they found Mrs. Stalman examining her accounts. An excellent knowledge of arithmetic had frequently enabled Mr. Pringleston to be of great service to Mrs. Stalman, who was not strong on that head, and hitherto he had always been happy to assist her. To-night, however, when his aid was once more called in, the thought struck him that the knowledge of arithmetic was an inconvenient knowledge. It might have been better to have had some knowledge of music; in that case he could have sat by Laura in the back drawing-room, could have played her accompaniments, and turned her leaves. Surely he might have made a better thing of it than Mr. Shepherd was making of his songs! Besides; Mr. Pringleston had not come there to do compound addition and listen to feeble tenor melody.

CHAPTER V.

MRS. STALMAN'S reverential opinion of Mr. Pringleston remained unimpaired, and she continued to refer all her difficulties to him as regularly as ever. But what was more important still, Laura seemed to welcome him now-a-days with almost greater cordiality than before. All their old jokes and confidences were religiously preserved. However unexpectedly he might appear, whatever she was doing, she always found him out in a second. Even when occupied in waltzing with Mr. Shepherd (a more frequent occurrence than her older friend liked), she always smiled at him over her partner's shoulder, in a way that all but compensated him for the vexation of seeing her so occupied.

Mr. Pringleston's familiar intercourse with the Stalmans soon gave rise to a report which annoyed him unaccountably. He had always considered Mr. Stevens, the solicitor, rather an underbred person; but there was not the slightest doubt of it when that person called him "a sly fellow who knew on which side his bread was buttered, and who was evidently going in for the rich widow!" This vulgarity was quite unpardonable. Mrs. Stalman was a good five years older than he was, and every one knows that, given a man and woman of forty, the woman is decidedly elderly while the man is in the prime of life. After all, a great many men *did* marry wives who were much younger than themselves. There were people of authority, too, who stoutly affirmed that unless there were at least fifteen years of seniority on the husband's side the matrimonial ship would probably be wrecked. Mr. Pringleston thought of these things continually. Mrs. Stalman would often interrupt his meditations by endeavouring to get up a conversation with him about her daughter's marrying;

but she found it extremely difficult to interest him in the subject. "I suppose men don't care about such things after a certain age," was her wise solution of the difficulty.

So no conversation had been held upon the subject, when one day Mr. Pringleston called as usual. Only Mrs. Stalman was visible.

"Not at home to any one else," said she to the servant. Her triumphant tone made Mr. Pringleston look up uneasily. "My dear friend," said she, with a radiant smile, "I am so glad you are come! I have expected you every day for this week past. I thought of writing, but I didn't know what to do, quite."

"Well?"

"Well! My dear girl, Laura, is engaged to be married. There! Now I have told you, I feel so relieved. For though it is very delightful to see them so happy, still I have never been quite easy. But now I know you approve, I shall be as happy as they are."

Mr. Pringleston had been balancing his hat between his knees. It fell off his knees and he stooped to pick it up, and then carried it to a distant table before answering. He looked very serious as he returned to his seat.

"You have not told me who he is, Mrs. Stalman."

"Haven't I? Really? But I am so excited and agitated that I am always making mistakes. Mr. Payne Shepherd. As I dare say you will have guessed."

"Yes," said he, getting up and strolling to the ferns in the back room. Mrs. Stalman was called away, and in her absence Laura entered. Mr. Pringleston started at the sound of her voice, and coming hastily forward took both her hands. "Your mother has told me," was all he could say.

"Has she?" cried Laura, the colour coming into her cheeks. "And I so wanted to tell you myself! I could not bear the idea of your hearing it from any one but me, so I would not let mamma write. Are you glad, Bluebeard?"

"No, dear," said he, "I am not glad to think of losing you."

"As if you *could* lose me! I will not submit to be lost! And besides, you *must* be glad because I am so happy. And you will like him very much, I am sure, won't you?"

"He wrote very bad exercises, Laura; I don't know how I shall be able to manage it," said he, trying very hard to smile.

Ah! It was hard work. Laura made no secret of her love, and gloried in showing it. As for Mr. Shepherd, Mr. Pringleston could not look at him for a sufficiently long time together to see how much or how little *he* might be in love. Yes. It was hard work to appear pleased and interested, and to seem to devote long hours of attention to Mrs. Stalman's discourses!

By-and-by preparations for the marriage began to be talked about. "Mr. Stevens has been speaking to me about the settlements," said Mrs. Stalman. "It seems there will have to be trustees. You will be one, of course?" But here Mr. Pringleston was very resolute. "I would far rather not have the responsibility."

A pressing occasion has arisen, too, for my going abroad. I *must* go, come what will."

The wedding was to take place in August, and he went abroad in July. He had not been in Paris since that early visit, on his return from which he had first met Laura. He went on through Germany, perpetually changing the scene of his distress, and trying to persuade himself that he had done right in leaving no address behind him in England, so that news from home might not disturb his search after tranquillity. Yet after all, somehow he found himself speaking to Mrs. Goldridge, who turned up one day at Homburg, and inquiring after common friends with great eagerness.

"Well," said she, after some talk: "I have been waiting very patiently for you to tell me all about the Stalmans; but it seems to me you are going to be as close as ever."

"I have been away longer than you have, and have had no letters. The—the—Marriage took place in August, I believe? The day was not fixed when I left, but the month was."

Mrs. Goldridge opened her eyes very wide: "Good gracious! Haven't you seen Monday's Times?"

"No."

"Come home with me, and let me show it to you."

She would not tell him a word more, but conveyed him to her lodgings, produced the paper, and pointed out an announcement under the head of Marriages, in which the bride and bridegroom's names were respectively: Geraldine Royle and W. Payne Shepherd.

"You are ill, Mr. Pringleston!"

"No, no. I feel the heat a little. Nothing, nothing. How long have you known of this?"

"I knew nothing of it before I saw it in the paper. Only, I heard before I left home that the Royles were all right again. It appears the failure of their bank was a false report: was, after all, confined to some comparatively unimportant losses. They never actually stopped."

Within four days, Mr. Pringleston arrived at Mrs. Stalman's house. It was night.

"Miss Stalman is very ill a-bed, sir," said the servant, "and missis is with her."

"Merely say I am here, and beg Mrs. Stalman not to come down on any account, unless it is quite convenient."

He was shown into the drawing-room, and the servant lighted one jet of gas in each of the chandeliers in the two rooms. They looked very dismal under this aspect, and his heart ached at sight of a pile of Laura's songs, which had been carelessly heaped together by a servant. The top one bore her name, written by Shepherd, and from a little work-basket on the table a piece of work peeped out which she had been doing for him, and over which Edward had often seen her smile.

The door opened noiselessly, and the poor

mother came in. They greeted one another in silence, and she sat down and sobbed.

Mr. Pringleston rose and paced the room for a while.

"I know nothing about it," he said at last, "beyond the fact of the marriage."

"Oh, it has been such a sad business! Such a sad business! I thought at first it would have come right if only you had been here; but now I see it was for the best. I am glad it is all over"—she spoke angrily—"for he is a false and mercenary villain."

Mr. Pringleston did not by any means contradict her.

"He appeared in his real character when they began to talk about the settlements. He wanted more money than the trustees would allow, and Mr. Stevens was very angry about it. At least, I think that was it. At any rate, he told, first Mr. Stevens, and then me, that he could not carry out the marriage on such terms. He went away, leaving me to break it to her. Ah, my friend, my friend! I wanted you sadly then."

"How is she now?"

"Very ill; but, thank God! out of danger."

"Does she speak of it much?"

"Never. She never mentions his name."

Many would have seen her if they might, some from curiosity, some from kindness; but only one person was admitted to see her. Day after day, Mr. Pringleston sat long hours with her. They never spoke of the trouble, and often sat silent; but those hours were the most precious hours in Laura's life. "Oh! It is a wonderful thing to have a friend!" she said one day at dusk, as he sat by her couch. She added, as she kissed his hand: "I feel so comforted when you are here; you seem to understand so. Sometimes I think you must have known some trouble like mine."

"Yes, dear Laura," he answered, in a very low voice. "Neither you nor I can love twice!"

But the questions that remain to be propounded are, whether she really loved but once, and if once, whom? And if she had deceived herself in supposing that she loved that shallow scoundrel, whom did she love when she undeceived herself? Guess!

As for Mr. Pringleston;—that he did not love twice, and that he never tried to do it, can be stated on oath. And yet he got married, mistrustful of himself in that wise, as he had been. If he had been less mistrustful of himself, whom might he have married, even before he saw himself in the glass and found he was forty-two? Guess! And whom did he most happily marry after all? Guess! It was not Mrs. Stalman. Guess again!

Now ready, bound in cloth, price 5s. 6d.,

VOLUME THE SEVENTEENTH.

The Right of Translating Articles from ALL THE YEAR ROUND is reserved by the Authors.